

© 2018 Shannon Epplett

THE STEPPENWOLF SCENARIO:  
ESTABLISHING THE HABITUS OF CHICAGO'S OFF-LOOP THEATRE COMMUNITY

BY

SHANNON EPPLETT

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theatre  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2018

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Valleri Robinson, Chair  
Professor and Dean Emeritus Robert Graves  
Professor Kirsten Pullen  
Associate Professor Stuart J. Hecht, Boston College

## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the history, development, and structuring elements of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre community. My research, grounded in Diana Taylor's concept of *scenarios* and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, takes a sociological lens to the historical antecedents and theatrical predecessors of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre community to find the origins and bases of the qualities which structure the contemporary theatre scene. These qualities; which I identify as community, collegiality, ensemble, hard work, perseverance, small stages, converted spaces, and contemporary and realistic plays; became the dispositions of the habitus that created the Off-Loop theatre scene. Starting in 1969, this scene developed and grew quickly, and within a matter of fifteen years, a motivating mythology – which I term “the Steppenwolf Scenario” – had emerged. This scenario, centered on the story of Steppenwolf Theatre, drives and structures the city's theatre scene to the present day.

The Off-Loop theatre scene began in 1969 with the founding of Body Politic and Kingston Mines theatres, but the conditions and ideas (in Bourdieu's terminology *dispositions*) that created the Off-Loop theatre habitus in some cases date to the end of the nineteenth century, and evolved and coalesced slowly over time. This study looks at the history of non-commercial and non-profit theatre efforts in Chicago, breaking it into three eras divided by the World Wars, leading up to the establishment of the Off-Loop theatre scene. In each era, I trace how the dispositions that serve as the basis for Chicago's Off-Loop theatre habitus became incorporated into the evolving habitus of the city's theatrical practitioners. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the social, political, cultural, aesthetic and economic conditions had become

favorable for Chicago's alternative theatrical scene (now dubbed "Off-Loop theatre") to burst into existence. Within a period of fifteen years, this once alternative theatre scene had become hegemonic, due in large part to the well-established habitus and the development of the Steppenwolf Scenario.

While the scenario that I identify bears Steppenwolf's name, this is not a study of Steppenwolf Theatre – rather, it is the story of a theatre community spinning itself into existence over time, and generating a story to perpetuate itself into the future. This study looks at, to use Diana Taylor's words, "the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes" that constituted the habitus that created the Off-Loop community, and the scenario that subsequently carries the Off-Loop community forward.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my committee: Dr. Stuart J. Hecht, Dr. Kirsten Pullen, and Dr. Robert Graves for their feedback, support, encouragement, and enthusiasm for my work. I would especially like to thank my advisor, Dr. Valleri Robinson, for stepping in at a critical moment and helping me to see my work in a new way, as well as for being enthusiastic about it at a point where I really needed that. I would like to thank Dr. Peter Davis, for guiding my research and writing in its formative stages. Dr. Ann Haugo at Illinois State University deserves special thanks for encouraging me to pursue a PhD, and for helping me find (or rather, *telling me* I had found) my thesis and dissertation topic. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Bruce Birningham of ISU; first for shepherding me through the thesis process and secondly because it was in his Performance Studies class that I wrote the first version of this work as a research paper.

I would like to acknowledge the late Dr. Arvid “Gus” Sponberg of Valparaiso University, as well as the cohort of Chicago theatre history people who have coalesced at MATC and ATHE panels: Megan Geigner, Cat Gleason, LaRonika Thomas, and Stuart J. Hecht. Gus showed me that Chicago theatre history was a field unto itself; the others let me know that I am not standing in the field all alone, and that – like Chicago theatre itself – we work best when we work together. I would like to thank Larry Russo for serving as my personal tour guide to Chicago theatre and sharing his first-hand knowledge and experience of working in Off-Loop theatre’s formative years. I would especially like to thank Mr. Rich Oman, my theatre instructor at Muskegon Community College, for seeing that I had something to offer the world of theatre,

even if it would take me a very long time to figure out what that was exactly. I guess it is this.

Thanks Rich!

I have been fortunate to receive financial support from the Graduate College Distinguished Fellowship and the Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois fellowship. I have also received support from the American Indian Graduate Center, and my own tribe – the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians - to pursue my studies and research. I would like to thank the Newberry Library in Chicago for two summer fellowships: the Newberry Consortium of American Indian Studies fellowship and the Susan Kelly Power and Helen Hornbeck Tanner Fellowship, which enabled me to do research and conduct interviews in Chicago. In addition to financial support, I would like to thank Ave Alvarado and the staff at the Graduate College, and Beverly Smith, Jamie Singson, and the staff at Native American House for providing the *other* kinds of support one sometimes needs as a graduate student.

I want to thank my grandparents, Calvin and Lola Epplert, for being a source of stability in my life. Finally, absolutely none of this would be possible without my wife and partner, Tanya Picard. Thank you for the support, patience, tolerance, feedback, critique, encouragement, advice, and love. I could not have completed this without it. Thank you. *Chi-Miigwitch*.

*For Tanya*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Justification and Significance.....	1
Theory.....	13
Positionality.....	31
Methods and Procedures.....	34
Limitations.....	35
Feasibility.....	40
Overview of Remaining Chapters.....	41
Literature Review.....	43
The Steppenwolf Scenario and the Habitus of Chicago’s Off-Loop Theatre Community	50
CHAPTER 2: 1890s – WORLD WAR I.....	54
Hull-House Theatre.....	60
Anna Morgan.....	75
Endowed Theatre in Chicago.....	88
The New Theatre.....	96
Donald Robertson.....	103
The Chicago Little Theatre.....	121
Other Efforts: The “Uplifters”.....	135
Kenneth Sawyer Goodman.....	136
Arthur and Mary Aldis and the Lake Forest Players.....	140
The Players’ Workshop and The Philistine Theatre.....	146
The B. Iden Payne Company and the Chicago Theatre Society.....	151
Conclusion.....	155
CHAPTER 3: CHICAGO THEATRE BETWEEN THE WARS.....	159
Hull-House Theatre.....	162
Alice Gerstenberg.....	170
The Goodman Memorial Theatre.....	193
The Chicago Federal Theatre Project.....	206
Minnie Galatzer and The Actors Company.....	218
Conclusion.....	232
CHAPTER 4: WORLD WAR II – 1968.....	234
Mayor Daley and the City That Works.....	237
Off-Broadway, Off-Off-Broadway, and Off-Loop.....	244
The Regional Theatre Movement in Chicago.....	250
<i>A Program for the Arts in Chicago, 1966</i> .....	253
John Reich and the Goodman Theatre.....	266
Bob Sickinger and Hull-House Theatre.....	284
Paul Sills: from Playwrights Theatre Club to Body Politic.....	303



June Pyskacek.....	331
Conclusion.....	346
CHAPTER 5: OFF-LOOP THEATRE, 1969 – 1984.....	349
The Habitus of Off-Loop Theatre.....	359
Steppenwolf Theatre Company, 1976 – 1984.....	371
The Steppenwolf Scenario.....	376
Conclusion.....	392
Future Research.....	395
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	397

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Even when we are unaware of our history, it acts upon us.<sup>1</sup>

Todd London, *An Ideal Theatre*

. . in each of us, in varying proportions, there is part of yesterday's man; it is yesterday's man who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result. Yet we do not sense this man of the past, because he is inveterate in us; he makes up the unconscious part of ourselves. Consequently we are led to take no account of him, any more than we take account of his legitimate demands. Conversely, we are very much aware of the most recent attainments of civilization, because, being recent, they have not yet had time to settle into our unconscious.<sup>2</sup>

Emile Durkheim

### Justification and Significance

In a humorous and incendiary 1952 essay, *New Yorker* writer A.J. Liebling determined Chicago to be backward, dull, and provincial, dubbing it "the Second City." Among the city's many shortcomings, Liebling took note of the nearly non-existent theatre scene: "There is, by the way, little opportunity to see theatre in Chicago even if you do pay for it. As a theatrical

---

<sup>1</sup> London, Todd, eds. *An Ideal Theater: Founding Visions for a New American Art*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2013. Print. xxii.

<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977. Print. 79.

center, it is outclassed by Oslo, which has a population of four hundred thousand”<sup>3</sup>. He later notes: “To compensate for the lack of ordinary theatre, there are scores of strip-tease joints.”<sup>4</sup>

A little over 25 years later, Julius Novick, writing on the growth of regional theatre for

*Performing Arts Journal* observed:

At this moment, I believe, the most vital theatre town in America is, of all places, Chicago, which until very recently had no local professional theatre at all except that illustriously creative cabaret, Second City. The Goodman, Chicago’s major resident professional theatre, never had the national eminence, the local pre-eminence, of the Guthrie in Minneapolis or ACT in San Francisco. It was never so obvious in Chicago that theatre talent had to be imported; Second City offered a model for making theatre yourself, out of what you are and what you know.<sup>5</sup>

Twenty-five years after that, Michael Billington, theatre critic for the *Guardian (UK)* visited the city and enthusiastically wrote, “For the poet Carl Sandburg it was the ‘City of the Big Shoulders’. Architect Daniel Burnham called it ‘the Paris of the Prairies’. That mix of raw energy and refined aestheticism makes Chicago one of the world’s great cities - and the current theatre capital of America.”<sup>6</sup> As these quotations suggest, Chicago’s theatre scene evolved quickly. In 1952, it came up lacking compared to that of a Norwegian city one-seventh its size; between 1979 and 2004 it went from being “of all places” to international recognition as the “theatre capital of America.”

---

<sup>3</sup> Liebling, A. J. *Chicago: The Second City*. New York: Knopf, 1952. Print. 53.

<sup>4</sup> Liebling 84.

<sup>5</sup> Novick, Julius. “Regional Theatre in America: A Generation Comes of Age.” *Performing Arts Journal*, May 1979: 159 – 166. [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org). Web. 11 Feb. 2010. 161

<sup>6</sup> Billington, Michael. “Off Broadway.” *The Guardian (UK)*, 23 June 2004: n. pag. [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com). Web. 1 June 2014.

Beyond the fact that Chicago's theatre scene seemed to develop rapidly, the scene itself was distinctive both in terms of process and product. It is unlike the theatre of New York in that it remains largely a non-commercial, non-profit theatre scene. The regional theatre movement which swept the country in the 1950s and '60s and sought to decentralize the professional theatre away from New York City by creating non-profit, residential theatre ensembles throughout the country, almost completely bypassed Chicago. Rather, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a new type of theatre scene emerged in the city, dubbed "Off-Loop theatre." "The Loop," being the nickname for downtown Chicago, is where most of the commercial theatres have historically been located; the term was a cognate of "off-Broadway" – the emergent theatre scene was initially viewed as an alternative to a commercial theatre strongly identified with New York.<sup>7</sup> Today, Off-Loop is the predominant theatrical mode in Chicago.

At its start, Off-Loop theatre was an outgrowth of the radical counterculture of the 1960s, consisting of small "hippie" theatre ensembles staging experimental performances in converted storefront spaces, primarily located in a sketchy neighborhood along Lincoln Avenue on the city's North side. In the mid-1970s, the focus shifted away from a countercultural avant-garde aesthetic and towards a distinctive, often hyper-realistic style of acting, writing, and staging; this style has come to become emblematic of Chicago theatre. Additionally, in Chicago there was a focus on ensembles performing in intimate, converted theatre spaces, as well as a

---

<sup>7</sup> Gleason, Catherine H. *Mapping the Lincoln Park Nexus: The Origin of the Chicago Off-Loop Theatre Movement*. Diss. U of Wisconsin-Madison, 2010. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2011. 2.

strong sense of collegiality among community members. These qualities marked Chicago's new theatre scene as unique and welcoming to newcomers.

The idea of a "Chicago style" of theatre gained currency in the mid-1980s. Journalism professor Scott Fosdick has written extensively on the role of newspaper critics in fostering the "Chicago style" of theatre. He observes that the style coalesced in the mid-1980s as commentators and theatre critics in Chicago, New York and elsewhere wrote of a style of theatre that distinguished the work of Chicago artists. The *Chicago Style*, as it was sometimes called, was never given a completely consistent definition, but most who used the term pointed toward a physically demonstrative form of acting that found its fullest expression in highly naturalistic plays performed in intimate venues<sup>8</sup> Fosdick looked at local newspaper coverage of theatre between 1975 and 1985, and determined the following to be the main characteristics of Chicago theatre in that period:

- There were many theatres.
- Most of them were relatively small. Compared to other cities its size, Chicago was short on big-budget, non-profit theaters.
- Chicago theater's most salient quality was its acting, which was raw, humane and passionate – naturalistic in the extreme.
- It was un-intellectual, if not anti-intellectual.
- Chicago lacked an avant-garde.
- Chicago was weak on the classics.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Fosdick, Scott. "Newspaper Critic Shapes Chicago Style of Theater." *Newspaper Research Journal* 23.2/3 2002: 114+. EBSCOhost. Web. 14 Nov. 2010. 115.

<sup>9</sup> Fosdick 124.

The final three qualities Fosdick cites have changed since 1985: the classics and the avant-garde play a much larger role in Chicago theatre today, and it is debatable whether the charge of anti-intellectualism still holds true. However, Fosdick's first three points remain valid - there are still many small theatres and only a handful of large ones, and Chicago-style acting is still often "naturalistic in the extreme." A 1984 *New York Times* article about the emergence of Chicago's theatre scene offers a significant description; Chicago director Robert Falls describes the "Chicago-style" for a New York audience:

The theater here is crude, rough, energetic and alive. There's this tradition in Chicago of performance which does not have polish. At its best, it's reflected in the work of Steppenwolf actors like John Malkovich or Glenn Headly. There's a riskiness. They're out there on a limb slugging it out with each other. You don't see that with any other city in this country.<sup>10</sup>

Julie Jackson notes that the term "naturalism" was used rather than "realism" in describing Off-Loop theatre in the 1980s and suggests that this was done to account for a quality particular to Chicago's theatre: a heightened sense of immediacy and emotionality which essentially broke down the fourth wall of realism.

Acting within a conventional scripted drama, Chicago actors create an impression of natural and spontaneous behavior so powerful it commanded the theatrical space as an acting platform, thus belying the basic conceit of

---

<sup>10</sup> Colander, Pat. "Chicago Theater Comes into its Own." *New York Times (1923-Current file)*: 2. 27 May 1984. ProQuest. Web. 29 Dec. 2017.

twentieth-century realism.<sup>11</sup>

Taking into account that a defining characteristic of Off-Loop theatre production in Chicago is that it frequently takes place in spaces that seat 100 people or less, often created out of converted storefront buildings, the simple fact of audience proximity to the performer furthers this sense of immediacy. Since the 1980s, the scene has evolved to become more diverse in terms of styles and forms of theatre. However, the influence of the “Chicago style” is still keenly felt, both locally and on a national scale.

Beyond the acting style, the structure and landscape of Chicago’s theatre scene is distinctive in several important aspects. First, it is characterized by the predominance of ensemble theatre companies rather than independent actors and freelance directors. Secondly, there has historically been considerably less film and television production taking place in Chicago compared to New York and Los Angeles, meaning that the energies of the creative community have been primarily focused on live theatre. Further, commercial theatre represents a very small portion of the overall theatre scene – it is overwhelmingly a non-profit theatre scene. Third, the city tends to attract early-career artists for several reasons, a primary one being that it is a much more affordable and livable city than either New York or Los Angeles; it is also relatively easy to produce one’s own work and have it seen by critics and the public, compared to New York or Los Angeles. As a result, Chicago has come to be seen as a place to develop one’s career, and the large number of non-Equity productions make it possible for an actor to work consistently and gain significant professional experience before “turning

---

<sup>11</sup> Jackson, Julie. "Not Just Rock 'N' Roll: Chicago Theatre, 1984-1990." *Theatre History Studies* 36 (2017): 75-111. 96.

Equity.”<sup>12</sup> These aspects - the dominance of non-profit, ensemble theatres, the emphasis on live theatre, and the relative youth of the artists - speak to the external realities of the theatre community.

Two unspoken qualities which are particular to the city’s theatre culture help maintain and perpetuate it as a nurturing environment. First, and most significant in the development and persistence of the Off-Loop scene, is an atmosphere of collegiality and community among theatre practitioners in the city. Rather than viewing one another as competition, the theatre scene is marked by a sense of mutual support, cooperation, and solidarity: an atmosphere in which the success of one – be it actor, writer, play or ensemble - is viewed as a benefit for all members of the community - in other words, there is a sense of “we’re all in this together.” Secondly, there are few barriers to entry. Off-Loop theatre is accessible in that it remains relatively inexpensive to produce a play and relatively easy to get it reviewed. Furthermore, the “Hit or Flop” mentality of commercial theatre is largely absent: the critical and financial stakes are not so high in Chicago that a bad review or box office disappointment spells the end of a production or career, as it can elsewhere. Lastly, hard work and perseverance - the ability to get back up and try again, is respected and valued within the community.

These economic, aesthetic, and cultural qualities make the city an attractive place for young theatre artists to begin their careers and allow for artistic experimentation and risk-

---

<sup>12</sup> Actors Equity Association, or Equity, is the professional stage actor’s union. “Turning Equity” is synonymous with being a professional actor – it is a sign of status within the community. It is often problematic: once in the union, members are limited to appearing in productions produced under an Equity contract. It is also possible for a Non-Equity performer to be cast in a show and have their union membership purchased for them by the producers, but this practice is less common. Because of the number of non-Equity productions in Chicago, “turning Equity” too early in ones’ career is often perceived as limiting an actor’s options as it precludes them from other types of work.



taking. These qualities are best encapsulated in advice veteran Chicago actor Mike Nussbaum gave to William Peterson, “If you want to be an actor and you want to have a career, I advise you to stay in Chicago and build your foundation. Chicago is a place for an actor to grow. You can fail here. You can make mistakes and not be sent away.”<sup>13</sup> These factors have allowed the particular and distinctive Chicago style of theatre to flourish locally and spread both nationally and internationally, so that Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre has now come to characterize the best of American theatre, as reflected by the quote from *Guardian* critic Michael Billington.

Finally, Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre community has evolved its own particular ideal of success which has come to be symbolized by the ascendancy of Steppenwolf Theatre, to such a degree that I have identified a combination of fact and fiction surrounding this company and their origin story which serves as a sort of constitutive mythology for the entire Off-Loop theatre scene. In 1990, Gary Houston – looking back at the Off-Loop theatre of the 1970s and 80s - wrote:

Women and men who probably majored in theater and knew one another on some college campus somewhere, who by election or plain happy fluke wound up here, are sustained by an often unarticulated belief that from mutual experience, and from the hoary precepts of some beloved faculty mentor, has alchemically arisen a viewpoint, sensibility, sense of humor plus configuration of talent the likes of which Chicago has surely never before encountered. What that is exactly is not the point; the point is that it’s bound to be, if not earth-shaking,

---

<sup>13</sup> Christiansen, Richard. *A Theatre of Our Own: A History and a Memoir of 1,001 Nights in Chicago*. Evanston: Northwestern UP. 2004. Print. 208.

Chicago-shaking. Sometimes – in no small way due to this *vital* arrogance - it is. And this arrogance propels new groups into self-promotional campaigns of the before-we-got-here-there-was-nothing type that helps blur our, and their, sense of heritage.<sup>14</sup>

Already, the narrative revolves around college-friend based ensembles. A certain combative energy is already a part of the story as well. In 2006, *Time Out Chicago* magazine summarized it this way:

In the beginning, there was a church. And in that church was a basement. And out of that church basement rose a scrappy group of wildly talented punks who were determined to do plays their own way. And thus was born Steppenwolf, and it was good.

These plays begat enthusiastic media coverage. And that coverage begat an audience, and that audience begat a scene. And from that scene came forth Organic, Remains, Wisdom Bridge, Lookingglass and Neo-Futurists. And these ensemble theaters' popularity begat national attention, which begat international attention. And before long, it was pretty much conceded that, given the decline of Broadway and the rise of the Chicago storefronts, we were the best damn theater city in the country.

---

<sup>14</sup> Houston, Gary. "A Vital Arrogance." *Resetting The Stage: Theater Beyond The Loop, 1960-1990*. Chicago: Chicago Public Library, 1990. 16 – 22. Print. 18.

And with the fame came mythology: Any grubby group of college-pal actors with a little money and the right mix of talent and pluck could start a theatrical revolution.<sup>15</sup>

That this well-known Chicago theatrical trope is rendered in quasi-biblical language speaks to the centrality of this narrative to the making of theatre and the theatre community in Chicago. The emergence of this story and its historical, structural, and social underpinnings are the subject of this study.

In *Melodrama and the Myth of America*, Jeffrey D. Mason defines myth as “. . . a form of symbolic narrative that links the present audience with both past and future; it shapes the raw material of experience, creating a cultural history, and it provides a paradigm for future actions and self-contemplation.”<sup>16</sup> The idea of becoming “the next Steppenwolf” has come to serve as an organizing principle and sustaining idea for the Off-Loop theatre community - in other words, a symbolic narrative – one that also encompasses a particular style of performance and production, play selection, and company organization.

This mythology is what I call the “Steppenwolf Scenario.” I began this study with the intention of articulating how it developed in the early to mid-1970s and has consequently served to organize and construct the Off-Loop theatre scene since that time. However, as I began to look into historical predecessors and antecedents to create context, I was led back in history much farther than I had initially anticipated: to the 1890s. What I had thought to be the context for the story, turned out to be the story itself. Despite the relatively short history of the

---

<sup>15</sup> Parsi, Novid, and Christopher Piatt. “Color Bind.” *Time Out Chicago*: [www.timeout.com/chicago](http://www.timeout.com/chicago). 26 July 2006: n. pag. Web. 5 May 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Mason, Jeffrey D. *Melodrama and the Myth of America*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993. Print. 10.

Off-Loop theatre scene – just fifty years – I saw that this organizing mythology was rooted in a much longer tradition of non-commercial theatre efforts and practices which seemed to be entirely unique to the city of Chicago.

The emergence of the Off-Loop theatre scene in the 1970s is often characterized as an explosion, but as this study shows, it is one that came about only after a very long period of fermentation.<sup>17</sup> This history shows a well-established but often unspoken custom of theatre production that utilizes an ensemble approach, has a community focus, and a collegial and open attitude towards other artists. There is also a long tradition of staging work on small stages, and in converted spaces. Consequently, the theatre scene that emerged in the early 1970s (Off-Loop theatre) had a particular character and aesthetic, unlike anything else happening elsewhere, but also entirely characteristic of and organic to Chicago. The Off-Loop theatre scene, which initially appeared to be an extension of the 1960s counterculture, developed rapidly because the fundamental qualities of the theatre community were already present and well-established.

The rapid development and exponential growth of Chicago's theatre scene in the 1970s and '80s is culturally and historically significant in its own right, as is the current cultural and aesthetic domination of the American theatre scene by Chicago actors, writers, and directors. Despite this fact, there has been relatively little scholarship to date on Chicago theatre. The closest thing to a comprehensive history is Richard Christiansen's *A Theatre of Our Own: 1,001 Nights in Chicago*. While Christensen's book is useful as an overview, it lacks depth and detail as

---

<sup>17</sup> One of the first scholarly works to focus on the history of Off-Loop theatre was Stephen Gray's 1997 dissertation, *A History of the Chicago Off-Loop Theatre Explosion: 1969 – 1989*.

a scholarly resource. Existing scholarship on Chicago theatre tends to focus on particular theatre companies or historical periods, and there is no theoretical work that deals specifically with the city's theatre scene. Despite the small quantity of work on Chicago theatre, the quality is quite good, and I feel that the historical question of "What happened?" has, to large extent, been dealt with by other researchers. The questions that this study seeks to answer are more a matter of "Why" and "How?" This study looks at the historical roots of the structuring qualities of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre scene – of community, collegiality, ensemble, hard work, perseverance, small stages, converted spaces, and contemporary realism – in order to understand its motivations and consider how this drives history forward.

This research is not focused on particular plays, actors, or theatre companies: despite the title, it is not really about Steppenwolf. This study is about the origins of the community that *created* Steppenwolf, as well as hundreds of other theatre ensembles. While it focuses on particular individuals and theatre organizations that have been influential at various times in history, it is really the history of the development of an artistic community. More than that, it is about tracing the origins of the things that make this community unique; the qualities and values that give it its character and enable it to perpetuate itself. This is the story of a performance community willing itself into existence over time.

Chicago's theatre matters in the bigger picture – both nationally and internationally. The city has had an enormous impact on the national culture in the actors who come out of its theatre scene and go on to fame in film and television (John Malkovich, Gary Sinise, Laurie Metcalf, Joan Allen, Joe Mantegna, W.H. Macy, etc.); in playwrights such as David Mamet, Tracy Letts, Brett Neveu, John Logan, and Rebecca Gilman and directors such as Mary Zimmerman,

Frank Galati, and Robert Falls; from the cultural juggernaut that Second City has become as a pipeline to *Saturday Night Live*, and then on to film and television (Tina Fey, Amy Poehler, Seth Meyers, Chris Farley, John and Jim Belushi, Bill Murray, etc.). Chicago serves as an incubator and crucible for the American theatre – a place for performers, writers, directors, and designers to develop and grow professionally.

## Theory

Chicago's theatre history is often summarized as the story of the Goodman, Steppenwolf, Second City, and sometimes one other company such as Lookingglass or Chicago Shakespeare. I knew from first-hand experience that Off-Loop theatre was the story of a *community*, rather than a particular company. In my master's thesis, I utilized a microhistory approach and told the story of two lesser-known theatre companies that were established in the early 1980s - Immediate Theatre and Stormfield Theatre – to paint a picture of the larger theatre community.<sup>18</sup> I also recognized the role that a set of ideas that exist surrounding the success of the Steppenwolf Theatre company played within the Off-Loop theatre scene. At that time, I called this the "Steppenwolf Script," and defined it as:

The main plot points of this script are: a group of college friends from a Midwestern University found a theatre company together. They choose plays that are ensemble pieces, usually gritty, realistic plays that explore the dark side of human relations. David Mamet, Sam Shepard, and Harold Pinter were

---

<sup>18</sup> My initial intention was to write about three companies that were all established in the Rogers Park neighborhood in 1983, and mentioned in a *Chicago Tribune* article, "3 New Off Loop Troupes. . . and other News." by Richard Christiansen. (*Chicago Tribune*, 10 March 1983). Time constraints limited me to writing about two of them: Stormfield and Immediate Theatre.

especially favored playwrights throughout the 1970s and '80s. The group sets up a theatre in a found space and produces on a shoestring budget, with the focus being on acting and directing rather than design or technical elements. The theatre produces work that is passionate, aggressive, emotional, and visceral. Critics notice and take a liking to their work, bringing in audiences that propel the company members to the next level of career success and the theatre toward institutional stability.<sup>19</sup>

The script offered a path to success, and by the mid-1980s, the Steppenwolf Theatre Ensemble provided a vision of what that success looked like. I reasoned that the Steppenwolf Script was a motivating mythology for the Chicago theatre community from the 1980s to the present; a mythology that in many ways determined what, why, how, where, and by whom theatre is practiced in Chicago. I did not attempt to theorize my idea any further than this. In my initial study, interviewees were asked if and how Steppenwolf had influenced them. While not everyone felt that they had been directly influenced by Steppenwolf, no one disputed or discounted the theory itself – Off-Loop theatre *does* seem to be driven by this “thing” that was described in the Steppenwolf Script idea. Jane Brody, founder of Immediate Theatre said, “. . . every new theatre is influenced by Steppenwolf. (. . .) I think the ability to make theatre in Chicago was based on the Steppenwolf experience. I think it still is.”<sup>20</sup> While I was able to articulate this idea of the Steppenwolf Script in my initial study, I was unsure how to treat it in my work or theorize it any further.

---

<sup>19</sup> Epplert, Shannon. “The Influence of the Steppenwolf Script on Chicago's Off-Loop Theatre.” MA Thesis. Illinois State U, 2011. Print. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Epplert 43.

A definition of myth, from Mason, comes closest to how I saw the Steppenwolf Script:

Myth is the voice not of individuals but of entire peoples; society creates myth, and myth speaks to society. The operation of myth is largely a matter of its collective nature, and a mythology can even help bind disparate peoples together or create the illusion that they are one. To contact many minds at once, myth must employ a semiotic repertoire that time and usage have hallowed and rendered widely accessible, so a mythology is a composition of cultural metaphors. The evocative power of myth is largely a function of the degree to which its signifiers are familiar to the audience; as a myth endures, its figures, images, tropes, and narratives become part of the semiotic repertoire, to the point that they – and the myth as a whole – seem organic or cosmic.<sup>21</sup>

What I initially referred to as the Steppenwolf Script, and now call the Steppenwolf Scenario, then, is a myth by and for the Off-Loop theatre community, built on a set of beliefs, assumptions, stories, anecdotes, and ideas continuously handed down and passed on within the theatre scene in Chicago. It seems to capture a great deal that is true about the experience of doing Off-Loop theatre: although Steppenwolf Theatre embodies much of it, it is really the shared story of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre community. The scenario describes what people do, how they do it, and why: it simultaneously encodes both the methods and goals of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre scene. Further, within the community, there is a sense that this path and these goals are viable – that it is not *just* a myth, but a path forward. It is possible to point to

---

<sup>21</sup> Mason 10 -11.



other groups and individuals besides Steppenwolf who have followed basically this same path and gone on to great things – to become “the next Steppenwolf.”

At the same time, the scenario limits choices and options, excludes and overlooks some people, and can also be viewed as giving artists a body of beliefs and practices to rebel *against*. Mason notes “. . . myth is inherently conservative, relying not on new or revolutionary ideas and significations, but on those that have survived the changes of the years. Myth therefore tends to reinforce the dominant ideology, which itself tends to rest on tradition.”<sup>22</sup> The Steppenwolf Scenario therefore simultaneously creates and constrains Chicago’s theatre community. It encodes a belief system for Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre community, in the same way that a mythology functions for a society.

From my initial research, it was clear that the Steppenwolf Scenario was a product of history, but it was also clear that it was actively writing the present – creating more history, essentially writing itself over time. I needed a larger theoretical framework with which to look at this idea. In my first study, I used the metaphor of a lens to describe how the Steppenwolf Script theory would be used: to look at the theory through the lens of history. Forty pages later, I state the exact opposite – it would be used to look at history through the lens of theory. Clearly, this lens worked both ways. Maybe it wasn’t a lens at all, perhaps it was a window . . . or a screen door?

I had unwittingly used a *grounded theory* approach, common in sociology, in my first study: it was a microhistory of two theatre companies, based on interviews with subjects, and

---

<sup>22</sup> Mason 11.

intended to prove a theory of my own devising. This study is an attempt to describe and determine origins for the structure that drives the history of the Off-Loop theatre community, and so I have turned - consciously this time - to sociology, and use a (semi-) structuralist theory to frame it, Pierre Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice*. Diana Taylor's *Archive and Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory*, gave me the initial conceptual link necessary to tie the Steppenwolf Script into a larger theoretical framework.

Taylor looks at how performances – whether they are dance or theatre performances, street protests or the personae of television personalities - embody and transmit cultural memories. In doing so, she refers to *scenarios*, which are pre-existing and largely predetermined social scripts that provides ready-made roles for participants. Scenarios structure the present based on the past: they “. . . exist as culturally specific imaginaries – sets of possibilities, ways of conceiving conflict, crisis, or resolution – activated with more or less theatricality.”<sup>23</sup> In practice, Taylor's concept of a scenario functions much like the scenarios used in *commedia dell'arte* – the outline of a story, roles, and outcome are largely predetermined and familiar to participants. Focused as her work is on Latin America, Taylor uses the “scenario of discovery” as an example: the white-skinned protagonist “discovers” brown-skinned people in need of conversion, conquest, or exploitation. This particular scenario has played out numerous times in numerous ways: it is essentially the script of every colonial encounter. It works both in art and in real life: from Columbus' meeting the Taino to Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's 1992 performance piece *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...*

---

<sup>23</sup> Taylor Diana. *The Archive and The Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. Print. 13.

which featured the two artists portraying members of an undiscovered “primitive” tribe, on display in a cage in the middle of the Whitney Museum.<sup>24</sup>

Taylor relates the idea of the scenario back to Bourdieu, defining it using his terms *habitus* and *dispositions*:

...scenarios are “durable, transposable dispositions.” That is, they are passed on and remain remarkably coherent paradigms of seemingly unchanging attitudes and values. Yet, they adapt constantly to reigning conditions. Unlike *habitus*, which can refer to broad social structures as class, scenarios refer to more specific repertoires of cultural imaginings.<sup>25</sup>

In my own theory, the initial action of a group of recent college graduates moving to Chicago and founding a theatre ensemble could be characterized as the “scenario of foundation.” In keeping with Taylor’s terminology, the *Steppenwolf Script* becomes the *Steppenwolf Scenario*.

Taylor’s use of the term *habitus* provided entrée into the work of sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and *The Logic of Practice*, he offers a theoretical framework that seeks to explain how social formations (or *structures*) reproduce themselves. Bourdieu describes *habitus* as:

...systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures, predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be

---

<sup>24</sup> Taylor 29.

<sup>25</sup> Taylor 31.

objectively “regulated” and “regular” without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.<sup>26</sup>

It is perhaps easiest to begin thinking of habitus as “culture.”<sup>27</sup> We are raised within a culture, which instills in us certain ideas and values – Bourdieu uses the terms *dispositions* and *generative schemes*. These dispositions and generative schemes form the basis for how we conduct ourselves in the world: our social *practice* (from which Bourdieu’s *Theory of Practice* takes its name). In this way, habitus structures us, and through our social practice, we in turn use the habitus-instilled dispositions and generative schemes to structure the world. Our habitus underlies the way we view the world, what we expect from it, sets our horizon of expectations, and determines what we view as possible and desirable. By doing what we know – acting out of our past experiences - we effectively recreate that which we already know, and in this way, social structures are reproduced. As Bourdieu discusses it, habitus seems to function almost like an independent entity that lives within us and acts through us to replicate itself.

Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* accounted for what I saw with the Steppenwolf Scenario: this thing that *created* history, but also was created *by* history, or in Bourdieu’s words

---

<sup>26</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977. Print. 72.

<sup>27</sup> Jenkins, Richard. *Pierre Bourdieu*. New York: Routledge. 1992. Print. 92.

“structured structures, predisposed to function as structuring structures.”<sup>28</sup> It was present, prevalent, powerful, and unexamined. It was the sort of thing that no one was taught, but everyone already knew, even if they didn’t know they knew it. It is put best in Bourdieu and Loïc J.D. Wacquant’s *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*: “Habitus is in cahoots with the fuzzy and the vague.”<sup>29</sup>

Bourdieu’s concept of habitus was an effort to account for individual agency within a social structure: whereas structuralist theories tended to focus on observed behavior (as in ethnographic fieldwork) and postulate social rules or codes of behavior from that, Bourdieu “...replaced the notion of rules which govern or produce conduct with a model of social practice in which what people do is bound up with the generation and pursuit of strategies within an organizing framework of cultural dispositions (the habitus).”<sup>30</sup> Habitus acts as more of guide to behavior; Bourdieu contrasts the notion of “Rules of Honor” which would rigidly dictate how a challenge must be responded to, with a “Sense of Honor,” which guides the way an individual might or might not respond to the same challenge. Bourdieu often characterizes the practice of social life as a game, one in which individuals use strategies in the competition for capital. He speaks specifically of having a “feel for the game,” that is, a mastery of the practice of social life, of the field, of one’s habitus that in many respects operates below one’s level of awareness. Practice itself is improvisatory but refers back to the dispositions and schemas instilled by the habitus.

---

<sup>28</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 81.

<sup>29</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre and Loïc J.D. Wacquant. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1992. Print. 22.

<sup>30</sup> Jenkins 39.

Habitus operates on several levels: it is individually held, but collectively shared, it is both the product and the process of social interaction. In *Pierre Bourdieu*, Richard Jenkins finds that Bourdieu holds three distinct views on habitus: that it is *produced* by the physical, material, and social conditions of existence; that the habitus is *adjusted* to these conditions; and finally, that there is a *reciprocal* relationship between habitus and the conditions of existence. In summarizing these different operations, he produces a more concise definition of habitus that encompasses the various aspects:

The habitus as a shared body of dispositions, classificatory categories and generative schemes is, if it is nothing else, the outcome of collective history: “The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history.” (45) Here, once again, we have people creating their own history, albeit not in circumstances of their own choosing. The habitus cannot in any simple sense, however, be considered the cumulative “collective wisdom” of the group (although this is doubtless true). Bourdieu is arguing that the objective world in which groups exist, and the objective environment – other people and things – as experienced from the point of view of individual members of the group, is the product of the past practices of this generation and previous generations. History culminates in an ongoing and seamless series of moments, and is continuously carried forward in a process of production and reproduction in the practices of everyday life. Here we have a process of production, a process of adjustment, and a dialectical relationship between collective history inscribed in

objective conditions and the habitus inscribed in individuals. History is experienced as the taken-for-granted, axiomatic necessity of objective reality. It is the foundation of habitus.<sup>31</sup>

I contend that Chicago's Off-Loop theatre scene is a community with its own habitus, and this study is an attempt to articulate and trace the roots of its development. Although this habitus seemed to develop quickly, between the early 1970s and mid-1980s, the dispositions of the habitus go back much further.

To return to Bourdieu's terminology, he refers to a given area of social activity as a *field*. "The field represents a separate social universe, constituted by its own laws, independent of those of politics and the economy."<sup>32</sup> Richard Jenkins provides a more detailed definition:

. . . a social arena within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes which are at stake – cultural goods (life-style), housing, intellectual distinction (education), employment, land, power (politics), social class, prestige or whatever – and may be of differing degrees of specificity and concreteness.<sup>33</sup>

Fields are arenas in which individuals compete for *capital* – which can take the form of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. In a 2001 *Dance Research* article, Gay Morris describes capital in the following terms:

---

<sup>31</sup> Jenkins 79; Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990. Print. 54.

<sup>32</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre and Randal Johnson, ed. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia UP, 1993. Print. 162.

<sup>33</sup> Jenkins 84.

Economic capital is financial. Cultural capital is the competence or understanding of how to decode cultural relations and is related to education and habitus. Social capital is the network of influential people and institutions an agent or institution can draw on for support. Symbolic capital is the form capital takes when it is known and recognized.<sup>34</sup>

Morris goes on to say that fields are governed by their own history; they work according to their own rules, but also respond to other factors – as an example, Chicago’s theatre scene responds to economic, demographic, and cultural changes. “Yet the specific field does not simply reflect what is going on outside it in a mechanical way, but rather refracts it through its own struggles.”<sup>35</sup>

This study will look at how the field of Off-Loop theatre has been shaped at times by such forces as theatre criticism and arts coverage, gentrification, urban renewal efforts, and Chicago’s rich history of municipal corruption. Jenkins states that “Each field, by virtue of its defining content, has a different logic, and taken-for-granted structure of necessity and relevance which is both the product and producer of the habitus which is specific and appropriate to the field.”<sup>36</sup> Relationally, habitus structures the field, and the field structures habitus, through the practice of *agents*.

*Agents*, in Bourdieu’s terminology, refers to individuals who act in their own interest in pursuit of social, economic, and cultural capital. The agents in the field of Chicago’s Off-Loop

---

<sup>34</sup> Morris, Gay. “Bourdieu, The Body, and Graham's Post-War Dance.” *Dance Research* 19.2 (2001): 52 – 82. EBSCOhost. Web. 19 June 2015. 54.

<sup>35</sup> Morris 54.

<sup>36</sup> Jenkins 84.



theatre would be all members of the Off-Loop theatre community. This is largely a self-selected and voluntary group, and is often characterized as open to all. The reality is that it has tended to be composed of predominantly white, midwestern, college-educated people between the ages of 20 and 35, from a middle- or working-class background. Theatre practitioners tend to follow a similar path into the scene: often coming to Chicago directly out of college theatre programs in the Midwest, and the racial and socio-economic makeup of community members reflect this path. The age bracket of this community tends to be young due to the realities of making a living in theatre: many participants exit the scene by their mid-30s in favor of more financially stable careers, particularly if they have not reached a desired level of success or recognition.

As a field, Off-Loop theatre has been characterized as lacking racial and ethnic diversity and being male-dominated and generally hostile to women. Since the 1980s, under the leadership of the League of Chicago Theatres, efforts have been underway by many theatre companies to diversify their casting and selection of material.<sup>37</sup> However, while awareness and opportunity have improved, it remains a very “white” field. In 2006, *Time Out Chicago* examined the issue of race in Chicago theatres, and drew the conclusion that the relative whiteness of Chicago theatre had to do with its college-based ensemble origins:

Any grubby group of college-pal actors with a little money and the right mix of talent and pluck could start a theatrical revolution. But there’s one little word that goes unspoken in this much-hyped lore. Add it in, and the story would go

---

<sup>37</sup> Vettel, Phil. "Nontraditional Casting Auditions in Chicago." *Chicago Tribune (pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Apr. 17, 1987: H. ProQuest. Web. 12 May 2018.

like this: A bunch of (white) college-buddy actors form their own (white) troupe. . . . Because these acting ensembles are friendship-based, they tend to also be race-based.<sup>38</sup>

A decade later, the magazine revisited the topic. While some established theatre ensembles such as Steppenwolf had grown to include more actors of color, and non-traditional or color-blind casting had grown more common, Chicago's Off-Loop theatre remained overwhelmingly white, and actors of color continued to feel marginalized.<sup>39</sup> The relative "whiteness" of Chicago theatre also ties to the history of racial segregation within the city; under Mayor Richard J. Daley, segregation was built into the map of the city itself through the placement of highways and public housing, all meant to keep African-Americans and other minorities in certain areas and out of others. Chicago remains one of the most racially segregated cities, and the theatre scene still reflects this: the Off-Loop scene today is centered on the city's north side neighborhoods, which remain predominantly white areas.

Unlike institutional racism, the perception that Chicago theatre is male-dominated and misogynistic has less historical longevity. This idea emerged in the mid-1970s as Off-Loop theatre came to national prominence, and is likely due to playwright David Mamet's work and Steppenwolf's first successful productions in New York; *True West* and *Balm in Gilead*. The earliest examples of Chicago theatre to make a national impression were of aggressive, confrontational, and male-oriented work, and this likely encouraged and perpetuated more of

---

<sup>38</sup> Parsi and Piatt n. pag.

<sup>39</sup> Vire, Kris. "Why is Theater in Chicago (Still) So White?" *Time Out Chicago*: [www.timeout.com/chicago](http://www.timeout.com/chicago). Dec. 7, 2016: n. pag. Web. 5 May 2018.

the same. Historically, women have played a substantial role in alternative theatre efforts in Chicago, as they have in the Off-Loop theatre scene – but the perception of the Off-Loop theatre scene as being hostile territory for women is not without a basis in reality. In recent years, the theatre community has made some progress in terms of addressing the issues of male-domination, misogyny, and abusive situations. In response to sexual harassment and abuse scandals in 2016, “. . . more than 700 actors and other theater professionals have joined together to form Not in Our House, a support group to deal with the aftereffects of abuse and to establish a code of conduct for non-Equity theaters.”<sup>40</sup> This is an organization formed by women who had suffered emotional, physical, and sexual abuse at Profiles Theatre, a small storefront theatre that for much of its existence was non-Equity and therefore unregulated by any professional body;

It was decided that the purpose of Not in Our House was threefold: first, to provide a support group for those who needed it and a list of resources, including therapists, lawyers, and advocacy organizations; second, to establish a code of conduct for non-Equity theaters, so actors and crew members who found themselves in situations like the one at Profiles would know where to go; and third, to work with Equity to change the language it used to discuss sexual harassment, intimidation, and discrimination.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Levitt, Aimee and Christopher Piatt, “At Profiles Theatre the Drama – and Abuse – is Real.” *Chicago Reader*, [www.chicagoreader.com](http://www.chicagoreader.com). 8 June 2016: n. pag. Web. 5 May 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Levitt and Piatt n. pag.

It is reflective of the Chicago theatre community ethos that the very name of the group, Not in Our House, denotes community, locality, and self-possession. To return to my original point, membership (being an *agent*, in Bourdieu's terminology) in the community is voluntary and self-selected. Agency, in the sense of the power of the individual to act on their own behalf within the field, has often been restricted to white male voices, but this has been moving towards greater inclusion in keeping with national trends.

*Capital* can be understood in economic terms such as being paid for one's work - something that is not always a given in Off-Loop theatre - as well as social capital. Becoming a member of Actors Equity Association, the stage actor's union, is a significant milestone. Equity membership is not just to be understood in economic terms, but also carries significant cultural and social capital. "Turning Equity" is seen as a sign of professionalism and achievement within the field, both for an individual actor, and for a theatre ensemble. Additionally, the types of roles one gets, reviews, and awards all figure as sought-after forms of capital.

The "taken-for-granted" quality of habitus that Jenkins refers to is what Bourdieu terms *doxa*, the culturally-shared sense that the natural and social world are self-evident. It is that which appears to be common sense, and goes unquestioned, unmentioned, and unchallenged.

Because the subjective necessity and self-evidence of the commonsense world are validated by the objective consensus on the sense of the world, what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying: the tradition is silent, not least about itself as a tradition...<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 167.

Doxa accounts for why some practices of Chicago theatre are so rarely questioned – because they seem patently obvious to all concerned. The high value placed on *ensemble* in Chicago theatre serves as an illustration of doxa. As an organizational structure, as a working method, and as a performative quality (“an ensemble performance”) - ensemble is highly valued, much sought after, and everyone knows it when they see it; but *where* it came from, *what* it is, and *why* it is valued are harder to answer. It is prevalent and pervasive, but goes largely unquestioned and unexamined: in Chicago theatre, it generally goes without saying – it is doxa - that *ensemble* is a good thing.

So to restate the scope of the project in terms of theory: the field of this study is Off-Loop theatre; this is the physical space of storefront theatres and rehearsal spaces, the less-tangible yet public space of the press (reviews, theatre columns, websites, and blogs), as well as the intangible psychic space the scene occupies in the hearts and minds of community members. It is situated within and subject to the larger fields of the economy, politics, and the social fields of the city. The theatre scene is also impacted by the national theatre field – Chicago is considered “regional theatre” to the “national” theatre of New York City. It is consequently impacted by national trends in theatre production, arts funding, Equity rules and so forth. Off-Loop theatre has always considered itself as an alternative to commercial theatre, which is represented by Broadway, which is also highly associated with New York City. On several levels, Off-Loop theatre exists in opposition to the field of New York’s commercial theatre - Broadway.

This study conceptualizes Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre scene as a community - this was initially based on my own feelings, but also the fact that it is frequently characterized this way.

Richard Christiansen confirms the prevalence of the sense of community, and links it to the theatre community's ties to improv:

There are strong, valid reason for living and working in this city. Prominent among them is the ever-present feeling of "community" (a word you will hear often in Chicago). Along with the competition, there is a real familial sense of caring and sharing, which gives individuals a concern for and interest in what other artists are doing. Perhaps this comes, in part, from the Chicago tradition of improvisation, which demands trust and cooperation among actors working together toward the same ensemble goal.<sup>43</sup>

Another significant example of this appeared in a June 1984 *Chicago Tribune* article by Deborah L. Wood on the booming north side theatre scene. Woods emphasized the "community" aspect throughout the piece, referring to "a unique camaraderie between theaters in Chicago – evidenced by the 94-member League of Chicago Theaters."<sup>44</sup>

While there is plenty of evidence to support that Off-Loop theatre constitutes a community, for the purposes of this study it is also considered as an *art world*, in accordance with Howard Becker's description in *Art Worlds*, his sociological look at the cultures and communities that produce fine art:

Art worlds consist of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as

---

<sup>43</sup> Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 291.

<sup>44</sup> Wood, Deborah L. "All the North Side's a Stage." *Chicago Tribune* (1963 – Current file) June 6, 1984: 2. ProQuest. Web. 18 June 2015.

well, define as art. Members of art worlds coordinate the activities by which work is produced by referring to a body of conventional understandings embodied in common practice and in frequently used artifacts. The same people often cooperate repeatedly, even routinely, in similar ways to produce similar works, so that we can think of an art world as an established network of cooperative links among participants.<sup>45</sup>

That theatre is a collective, collaborative endeavor, perhaps more so than any other art form, almost goes without saying (or doxa). Becker's description adequately describes the Chicago theatre community. This community includes actors, directors, writers, designers, technicians, front-of-house staff – as well as the more peripherally-involved, such as theatre critics and arts writers.

This study argues that Chicago's Off-Loop theatre community is an art world, the theatre scene is a field, and the theatre community has developed its own habitus, based on dispositions rooted in historical precedent, which have helped to produce and maintain the habitus, and driven the Chicago theatre scene in the direction that it has. This habitus has given rise to the Steppenwolf Scenario, which acts as a "culturally specific imaginary" to transmit these ideas. Agents – theatre practitioners and ensembles – acting in the field, struggling for capital – good reviews, audiences, attention, funding – have created this habitus over time. It is unique and specific to Chicago. This study is an attempt to look at the history that has produced this habitus.

---

<sup>45</sup> Becker, Howard S. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: U of California Press, 2008. Print. 34.

## Positionality

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice is attractive because of his concern with *reflexivity* in his work. This is the recognition on the part of the researcher that the act of observation itself produces certain kinds of observations.<sup>46</sup> Bourdieu began his career doing ethnographic fieldwork, which is based on the idea that detached observation of people separate from the researcher would yield insight about social life. However, social life is interactional – mere observation produces an unrealistic picture.<sup>47</sup> Bourdieu encouraged researchers to acknowledge the act of observation itself, and maintain an awareness that the observer is themselves a social actor, calling this *Participant Objectivation*. In other words, the researcher is *also* a product of habitus, and can only see that which his own habitus allows.

Bourdieu's concern with the role of the researcher in the study appealed to me as I was hardly an impartial observer, and my ability to understand and “read” the Chicago theatre community grew out my participation in it. Between 1993 and 2009, I worked as a theatre director and arts administrator in the city. In 2009, I left to pursue a master's degree at Illinois State University.<sup>48</sup> When I left the city, I had no intention of making the theatre scene the topic of my research, until I realized how quickly the past is forgotten. In the summer of 2010, I saw a headline on my homepage, “Building Collapse on Howard Street.” The link led to a video clip of a CBS-2 correspondent live on the scene, standing near a small pile of bricks on Chicago's far North side. A piece of masonry had fallen from the façade of a vacant building, narrowly

---

<sup>46</sup> Jenkins 48.

<sup>47</sup> Jenkins 51.

<sup>48</sup> Coincidentally, Illinois State University is the alma mater of the Steppenwolf ensemble.



missing a pedestrian. As breaking news stories go, it was thin material. What raised my ire was the reporter stating that the building had once been the home of “Winsome Bridge Theatre.”<sup>49</sup> I had attended shows at *Wisdom* Bridge, and I knew people who had worked there.<sup>50</sup> The reporter’s offhand mangling of the name, and the fact that no one saw a need to correct him, bothered me deeply.

Later that summer, I toured an exhibit of Lisa Howe-Ebright’s theatre photos at the Harold Washington Library with my friend, Larry Russo.<sup>51</sup> Howe-Ebright was the production photographer of choice for Steppenwolf, the Goodman, Chicago Shakespeare, and Northlight Theatre. Russo began his acting career in Chicago in 1970 and worked at all of the major theatres in the city. Photos of Larry’s productions were in the exhibit, and *every* photo elicited a story from him about the production, the theatre, or the actors depicted. I felt as if I were looking at old family photos and hearing old family tales.

The sense of community became even more evident to me in the following years; 2014 saw the deaths of several important figures within the Chicago theatre scene in quick succession – due to age, as well as illness and accident. The manner in which the Chicago theatre community marked the deaths was telling - each was mourned *by* the community as a loss *to* the community, regardless of whether they were elder statesmen of the theatre scene

---

<sup>49</sup> In all fairness, he may have said “Winston” – it was garbled. The point is that he clearly got it wrong and had no idea what he was talking about.

<sup>50</sup> Wisdom Bridge Theatre had been one of Chicago’s most significant Off-Loop companies: founded in 1974, it was best known for the work of director Robert Falls, Shozo Sato’s Kabuki adaptations of Western classics, and Aiden Quinn’s punk rock Hamlet spray painting “To be or not to be” on the walls of Elsinore. It closed in the mid-1990s.

<sup>51</sup> “Capturing Chicago Theater: 35 Years of Theater Photography by Lisa Howe-Ebright (1974-2009).” Harold Washington Library Center, May – October, 2010.

or relative newcomers. All mattered. Reflecting on the number of losses in 2014, sound designer and composer Lindsay Jones said:

When I travel other places and people ask me what Chicago theater is like, I tell them that it's like a family. Because it is, truly. It's like no place else. And when you work in Chicago, you become a part of that family forever. We're proud of that here. That's who we are. Always.<sup>52</sup>

Jones' statement captures what it is at base that inspired me to undertake this study: there is a cohesiveness and inclusivity to Chicago's theatre scene, like a family or a community.

I wanted to write a history of the community *as* a community: having been a part of this community, I knew how pervasive the idea of being "the next Steppenwolf" was. The phrase began to appear in the press in the 1980s (replacing "the next St. Nicholas," which was how Steppenwolf was initially heralded). I arrived at a theory that accounts for the way the Off-Loop theatre scene functions – what motivates it and perpetuates it, and wrote about this in my master's thesis, calling it the Steppenwolf Script (now the Steppenwolf Scenario). Stated as a brief narrative about a "typical" Chicago theatre company's path to success, the similarity of my account to the passage from the 2006 *Time Out Chicago* article cited earlier is not lost, although I did not see the article until 2018. This similarity speaks to the pervasiveness and taken-for-granted-ness (doxa) of the idea itself. These narratives encapsulate to some extent the early history of nearly every theatre ensemble in Chicago. When I have stated the Steppenwolf Scenario to Chicago theatre practitioners, it is often met with the laughter of

---

<sup>52</sup> Jones, Chris. "Deaths Are Felt Deeply by Chicago Theater family." *Chicago Tribune*. [www.chicagotribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com). Sept. 7, 2014: n. pag. Web. 25 June 2015.

recognition. This idea – the Steppenwolf Scenario - rings true to people who know Chicago theatre, and seems to warrant further exploration. This study began as an effort to understand the origins of this myth.

## **Methods and Procedures**

This study uses archival research and existing scholarship to articulate the origins of beliefs and practices that contributed to the habitus of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre scene, using a theoretical framework based on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Diana Taylor. As much as possible, I look to scholarship that already exists on specific theatre companies, individuals, or historical periods for evidence that supports my thesis that the dispositions of the Off-Loop theatre habitus are rooted in earlier practices. This is supplemented with my own original research where archives are available, as in the case of Alice Gerstenberg and Donald Robertson, or where existing historical scholarship is lacking.

This study looks at the non-commercial, art, and alternative theatre efforts that predate Off-Loop theatre, for the purpose of unfolding and understanding the dispositions, practices, and ideas that were already part of Chicago's theatre culture, and which coalesced into the habitus of Off-Loop Theatre. Off-Loop theatre gave rise to the Steppenwolf Scenario, which acts as a mythology for the community. Taylor states that scenarios "make visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes."<sup>53</sup> Often, that is what this study does: to find evidence in the past of things that haunt the present. As Bourdieu states, habitus is "fuzzy and vague" – it is difficult to establish for certain how something as ineffable as "a sense

---

<sup>53</sup> Taylor 28.

that ensemble is a good thing” began, or was transmitted over time; however, the qualities that I identify as composing Off-Loop theatre’s habitus all have sources and predecessors in earlier movements. As the quotes that I open this section with state, even if we are unaware of our history, it acts upon us. It is the work of habitus that makes this so.

This study focuses on earlier non-profit and non-commercial theatre efforts in the city, and on the idea of Chicago theatre as a functioning community, rather than as a site of theatre production – this study is about the people and community of Chicago theatre as opposed to the products of their labor. Specific plays or productions are only referenced when they have relevance to the development of the dispositions of the habitus. Finally, this research is not about Steppenwolf, but rather how an idea of success that Steppenwolf has embodied has formed over time.

### **Limitations**

This study focuses on non-commercial and non-profit theatrical activities in Chicago from the 1890s to the 1980s. The most significant limitation to this study is economic: it looks at only non-commercial and non-profit theatre efforts. Commercial theatre refers to theatre for profit, and theatre for entertainment. Off-Loop theatre began as a reaction to the commercial theatre industry, so I will be focusing on non-commercial, non-profit, and “other” theatre efforts that stood beyond the popular theatre mainstream of their times. Economics also relate to geography: in Chicago, most commercial theatre takes place in “The Loop,” this is the nickname for an area of downtown Chicago encircled by elevated train lines. Within the Loop lie most of the large commercial theatres built prior to 1929 - the Chicago Theatre, the CIBC (formerly the Shubert), the Oriental, the Auditorium, and the Cadillac Palace remain. These

theatres seat in excess of one thousand people, feature large proscenium stages, and have traditionally presented touring productions of Broadway plays. Most (but not all) of the commercial theatre productions in Chicago have been housed in theatres located in the Loop, so “Loop theatre” would indicate Broadway-based, commercial theatre in Chicago, although the term is not in current usage. “Off-Loop,” then, is that which exists as an alternative to mainstream commercial theatre; I focus on historical examples of theatres that also defined themselves in this manner.

The term “Off-Loop” first appeared in the 1950s but gained currency in the late 1960s as a way to denote an alternative to commercial theatre.<sup>54</sup> The term denoted something other than “community” or amateur theatre, and consciously echoed the term “Off-Broadway,” which had emerged in the 1950s as a term for non-commercial alternatives to Broadway in New York City. The Commercial theatre represents the mainstream against which Off-Loop theatre groups were initially reacting. In defining themselves in opposition to Loop theatre, and aligning themselves with the Off-Broadway movement, Off-Loop theatre brought a new theatrical aesthetic to Chicago. When filtered through the habitus of Chicago’s theatre community, a “Chicago-style” of theatre was born.

The terms “Loop” and “Off-Loop” theatre are general terms; “Loop” denotes commercial theatre, while “Off-Loop” indicates a non-profit and non-commercial status. However, Loop theatres such as the Shubert, the Oriental, the Cadillac Palace, the Blackstone, and the Auditorium are rental houses, and are also used for non-profit productions and events - at times this has included Off-Loop shows that have become successful and warranted

---

<sup>54</sup> Sills, Kathleen. “The Inside Track to the Future: Chicago Theatre 1950- 1971” Diss. Tufts U. 2001. Print. 21.

extended runs. Chicago-based commercial theatre operations, such as Drury Lane Oakbrook and Marriott's Lincolnshire, are located outside of the Loop in the suburbs while the Goodman Theatre - an Off-Loop company in that it is non-profit and non-commercial - is located in the Loop. Lastly, the terms "Loop" and "Off-Loop" are frequently used in an aesthetic and therefore highly subjective sense: an Off-Loop theatre could produce work that is considered very "commercial," and vice versa.

Organizationally, Off-Loop theatres are incorporated as non-profit organizations, if in fact they are organized in the legal sense at all.<sup>55</sup> Non-profit as opposed to for-profit theatre became a legal distinction with revisions to the U.S. tax code in 1954.<sup>56</sup> Among other changes, it created the 501(c)3 tax designation for non-profit arts groups. This created a category of organizations that are tax-exempt and could solicit donations and grants. The binary of non-commercial versus commercial denotes an aesthetic viewpoint, while the non-profit versus for-profit binary is a financial and legal distinction. All of the major Off-Loop companies are organized as non-profit corporations, many smaller ones are not organized in a legal sense at all. The subject of this study is Off-Loop theatre, which in regards to aesthetics and organization is generally non-commercial, and non-profit.

The Off-Loop theatre scene as we know it today developed after 1968, and the movement originally emerged in the North side neighborhood of Lincoln Park - it was often

---

<sup>55</sup> It is only necessary to be organized as a non-profit corporation in order to conduct fundraising. It is common for new companies to produce shows before taking the steps to incorporate as a non-profit organization. In such cases, these efforts would be considered for-profit by the state and federal governments. However, the money at stake in such production circumstances is generally so small that the distinction is minor.

<sup>56</sup> Arnsberger, Paul, et al. "A History of the Tax-Exempt Sector: An SOI Perspective." *Statistics of Income (SOI) Bulletin*. 27.3 (2008): 105-135. Print. 106.

referred to as “Lincoln Avenue Theatre” before the name “Off-Loop” became common.<sup>57</sup>

Theatres considered part of this scene tended to feature resident acting or artistic ensembles, tended to perform avant-garde, non-commercial work, and performed in converted commercial spaces - hence it is also referred to as “Storefront Theatre.” As the scene developed in the 1970s, the focus shifted from avant-garde and experimental work to contemporary realism, a distinctive acting style that tended to be highly physical and emotionally bare evolved, and a stripped down, minimalist production and design aesthetic emerged. The ensembles that made the scene have tended to be formed by groups of friends who attended the same undergraduate college theatre programs. The term “Off-Loop theatre,” then, generally denotes a particular *type* of theatre company, a particular *style* of production, and a particular *aesthetic* – all of which are unique to Chicago.

The origins of the habitus that gave rise to Off-Loop theatre date back to the 1890s, with Anna Morgan’s efforts to stage the “New Drama” and the establishment of theatre programs at the Hull-House Settlement. This study breaks the ensuing history into three periods of activity that generally conform to the World Wars: a pioneering and innovative little theatre scene prior to World War I; a more training-based and cause-driven theatre community predominated between the wars; and the era from the end of World War II to the late 1960s which was highly influenced by Off-Broadway and the regional theatre movement. The 1968 Democratic Convention mark the beginning of a new era for Chicago theatre, and the early Off-Loop theatre scene can be seen as a direct outgrowth of the activism and protest of this era. This study takes the establishment of the Body Politic and Kingston Mines spaces in 1969 as the

---

<sup>57</sup> Gleason 4.

birth date for the current Off-Loop theatre scene, and this is supported and accepted within the existing scholarship.<sup>58</sup> The early Off-Loop scene that emerged at Body Politic and Kingston Mines clearly owed a debt to the improvisational comedy scene and was energized by the chaos and strife of the 1968 Democratic convention.

This study will not focus on amateur or community theatre efforts, although at times this can be a somewhat difficult and subjective distinction to make. This is particularly true of the early 1970s, when Off-Loop theatre was frequently listed in newspapers or treated in reviews as “community” or “amateur” theatre. It is also true that much Off-Loop theatre would fail the definition of “professional” in the sense of salaries being paid and union rules observed. For the purposes of this study, the aspirations and motivations of the artists will be considered as far as they can be known, and a theatrical effort will be counted as “professional” if it appears to be considered as such by its participants, regardless of whether profits were earned, or salaries paid.

Improvisation, which began with Viola Spolin in the 1930s, developed into its own distinct performance genre in the hands of her son, Paul Sills. Sills is known for being one of the founders of Second City, but he is also significant in establishing Off-Loop theatre in the late 1960s. This study will only look into the improv scene as far as it interacts with the development of Off-Loop theatre, although within the career of Paul Sills, this can sometimes be a difficult distinction to make.

---

<sup>58</sup> Gray, Stephen C. *A History of the Chicago Off-Loop Theatre Explosion: 1969 – 1989*. Diss. Ohio State U, 1997. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1999. Print. 3; Gleason 3.



## **Feasibility**

This study is an expansion of my master's thesis research; at that time, I proposed the Steppenwolf Script theory as a motivating mythology for Chicago's Off-Loop theatre scene, and through a combination of interviews and archival research, created histories of two theatre companies that formed in the early 1980s after Steppenwolf had already become prominent. The purpose of the interviews was to test the validity of the theory itself. My initial study used no greater theoretical framework to articulate the Steppenwolf Script.

This study seeks to investigate the historical sources of the habitus of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre scene and suggests how this is both created and perpetuated by the Steppenwolf Scenario. This study builds upon the work of other historians and brings in original archival research to trace the development of a theatrical community over time, using Bourdieu's Theory of Practice as a theoretical framework.

This research was made possible by a Graduate College Distinguished Fellowship from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the American Indian Graduate Center Fellowship, the Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois Fellowship, and two fellowships from the Newberry Library that enabled me to spend summers in Chicago conducting interviews and doing archival research: the Newberry Consortium of American Indian Studies Fellowship (2014) and the Susan Kelly Power and Helen Hornbeck Tanner Fellowship (2015). Finally, my graduate studies have also been supported by the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians Self-Sufficiency Incentive Award Program.

## Overview of Remaining Chapters

The second chapter of this study is an overview of non-profit and non-commercial theatre efforts in Chicago from its beginnings at the Hull-House Settlement and in the efforts of Anna Morgan in the 1890s to World War I. This is the birth of the art theatre or little theatre movement, of which Chicago was the American epicenter. In this period, we first see the project to elevate theatre from an entertainment to an art form. A new theatrical community coalesced, drawing Chicago's social elite interested in theatrical "uplift" into a "bohemian" circle inspired by the Free Theatre movement, the New Drama, and New Stagecraft coming from Europe. This community was unable to weather the changes brought about by the first World War, yet left in place many elements of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre habitus – the dispositions for community, collegiality, ensemble, small stages, and converted spaces - that became important later.

The third chapter looks at the era between the world wars, in which the idea of theatre as a force for social change takes root. Non-profit and non-commercial theatre efforts in this era were often put in service to the community: programs such as the Federal Theatre Project and Hull-House Theatre utilized theatre production and performance as a means to address and enact social and political issues of the times. The theatre efforts of this era were often geared toward training and local development, and represent a democratization of theatre production and practice. The disposition for collegiality and community for the theatre scene seems to have altered, and the disposition for ensemble became stronger and more sharply defined. A Chicago aesthetic begins to emerge in terms of the depiction of blue-collar, working-class, and distinctly local themes and characters on the stage.

The fourth chapter covers the period following World War II to 1968. This is a period in which Off- and Off-Off-Broadway and the national regional theatre movement, as well as the local development of improvisational comedy would exert their influence on Chicago's theatre scene. Significantly, the consciousness of Chicago as a "Second City" takes hold, which in many ways drove the habitus towards innovation, experimentation, and a sense of local pride.

Templates for Off-Loop theatre are established by the Playwrights Theatre Club in the mid-1950s and Bob Siskinger's Hull-House Theatre program in the 1960s. Amid the chaos and violence surrounding the 1968 Democratic National Convention, Paul Sills' Story Theatre group debuted. This becomes the transformative moment for the Off-Loop theatre scene: with Sills' Story Theatre, Chicago began to develop both a performance aesthetic and theatrical culture that were unique in terms of form and content, as well as organic to the city itself. The dispositions of the habitus for Chicago's Off-Loop theatre scene were now in place.

The final chapter covers the establishment and development of the Off-Loop theatre community from 1968 until the mid-1980s. During this time, the Steppenwolf Scenario develops: in 1984, when the Steppenwolf Theatre company announced that, despite their success in New York, the company would remain based in Chicago. With this act, the Steppenwolf Scenario had become fully developed, and the habitus of Off-Loop theatre was fully articulated. At this point, Steppenwolf's story becomes the synecdoche for Chicago's Off-Loop theatre scene: it inspired subsequent waves of recent college graduates with theatre degrees to move to Chicago and start their own theatre companies, thereby perpetuating the habitus.

## Literature Review

There has been very little scholarship on Chicago theatre overall. The closest thing to a comprehensive history of Chicago's theatre is Richard Christiansen's *A Theatre of Our Own: 1001 Nights in Chicago*. Written by the former theatre critic for the *Chicago Tribune*, it is as much a personal memoir as a history for Chicago theatre lovers. Mark Larson's *Ensemble Chicago: The Making of a Theatre Town* is heading to press as I write this. It is an oral history of the Chicago theatre scene based on interviews with theatre artists, and as such promises to be a great resource - but was obviously not something to which I had access for my own work.

Scholarly work on Chicago theatre has tended to focus on specific theatre companies or historical eras. Wherever possible, I have utilized existing scholarship to build the case that the habitus of Off-Loop theatre has historical precedents. Stuart J. Hecht's dissertation *Hull-House Theatre: An Analytical and Evaluative History*, covers nearly a century of Chicago theatre history through theatre programs at the Hull-House Settlement House. Hecht's work covers what can be regarded as the "bookends" of the pre-Off-Loop theatre era: the Hull-House Players under director Laura Dainty Pelham were a foundation of the little theatre movement in Chicago at the beginning of the century, and Robert Sickinger's Hull-House Theatre program of the 1960s served as an immediate precursor to the Off-Loop theatre scene.

Dissertations by Jan Charles Czechowski (*Art and Commerce, Chicago Theatre 1900 – 1920*), Wilma June Dryden (*Chicago Theatre as Reflected in the Newspapers 1900 – 1904*), James Lee Highlander (*An Historical Study of the New Theatre and The Robertson Players of Chicago [1906 – 1908]*), Bernard Frank Dukore (*Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre*) and Joyce Lorraine Chalcraft Sozen (*Anna Morgan: Reader, Teacher, and Director*) provided

historical background and insight on Chicago theatre efforts in the early part of the twentieth century and frequently served as a starting point for my own archival research. Memoirs by Anna Morgan (*My Chicago*, 1918) and Maurice Browne (*Too Late to Lament*, 1955) provided first-hand accounts of the art theatre scene in Chicago. Finally, Dorothy Chansky's *Composing Ourselves: the Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience* and Thomas H. Dickinson's *The Insurgent Theatre* (1917), helped place Chicago's art theatre scene into a national context.

Theatre activity in the era between the world wars centered on the Federal Theatre Project, Hull-House, the Goodman Theatre, and the work of Alice Gerstenberg and Minnie Galatzer. For the Federal Theatre Project, Vanita Marian Vactor's dissertation *A History of the Chicago Federal Theatre Project Negro Unit: 1935 – 1939*, and Patrick Schmitt's master's thesis *The Chicago Federal Theatre Project: 1935 – 1939* served as primary sources. Elizabeth Osborne's *Staging the People: Community and Identity in the Federal Theatre Project* also provided context. Hecht's dissertation remained the main source for information on Hull-House activities in this era. The Goodman Memorial Theatre began operations in the 1920s, and James Samuel Newell's dissertation *A Critical Analysis of the Development and Growth of the Kenneth Sawyer Goodman Memorial Theatre and School of Drama, Chicago, Illinois 1925 – 1971*, served as the basis for this research.

Writer and director Alice Gerstenberg's theatre career began in the art theatre era and continued almost uninterrupted until her death in 1972. Some scholarship exists on her career; journal articles by Stuart J. Hecht ("The Plays of Alice Gerstenberg: Cultural Hegemony in the American Little Theatre." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 1992) and Dorothy Chansky, ("Alice Gerstenberg and the 'Experimental Trap'," *Midwestern Miscellany*, 2002); but these focus

primarily on her work as a playwright. Gerstenberg's archives are held at the Newberry Library and proved to be a valuable resource regarding her work as a director, producer, and arts patron.

Kathleen Sills' dissertation *The Inside Track to the Future: Chicago Theatre 1950 – 1971* covers the era immediately prior to the Off-Loop theatre era, and provided background on Playwrights Theatre Club, the Chicago City Players, Bob Siskinger's Hull-House theatre program, Minnie Galatzer, and the resident/regional theatre movement in Chicago. Hecht's work on Hull-House served as the primary source for information on Robert Siskinger's revitalized Hull-House Theatre program in the 1960s – in many ways a direct precursor to the Off-Loop theatre scene. Newell's dissertation on The Goodman is also valuable as it focuses on the efforts of artistic director John Reich to turn the Goodman into a fully-professional regional theatre.

Although the improvisational comedy scene is beyond the scope of this research, it is impossible to look at the development of Off-Loop theatre without considering it. The improv scene, most notably Second City, traces its origins to the campus of the University of Chicago in the mid-1950s and the work of Paul Sills, the son of improv's "mother," Viola Spolin. Sills later established the Body Politic on Lincoln Ave., considered one of the founding Off-Loop theatres. There are several sources for information on Second City and its predecessor The Compass: Janet Coleman's *The Compass*, Donna McCrohan's *The Second City: A Backstage History of Comedy's Hottest Troupe*, *The Second City: Backstage at the World's Greatest Comedy Theater* by Sheldon Patinkin and Robert Klein, and Jeffrey Sweet's influential *Something Wonderful Right Away*. While these are all popular press books, they give a comprehensive picture of the history of the groups and institutions Paul Sills' had a hand in creating. Jeff A. Barker's thesis,

*Paul Sills' Life in the Theatre: The First Half-Century (1929 – 1979)* is the only academic scholarship on Sills' career.

Catherine Gleason's dissertation *Mapping the Lincoln Park Nexus: The Origin of the Chicago Off-Loop Theatre Movement*, tells the origin story for the Off-Loop theatre scene, locating its emergence in the radical counterculture of the 1960s, and tying it to urban renewal efforts in the Lincoln Park neighborhood. Stephen Gray's dissertation *A History of the Off-Loop Theatre Explosion: 1969 – 1989*, documents the early years of the scene. Gleason focuses on the social, cultural, political, and economic forces that gave birth to the Off-Loop theatre scene in the late 1960s, while Gray covers the social and economic factors that allowed the scene to flourish in the 1970s. Between these two works, one gets a good perspective on how the theatre scene developed as it did.

Scott Fosdick has written several articles and a dissertation, *The Press on Chicago Theatre: Influencing an Emergent Style*, on the relationship between newspaper criticism and the theatre scene in Chicago. One of Fosdick's significant contributions to the scholarship is the idea that *Tribune* critic Richard Christiansen has played an overly influential role in determining the direction of Off-Loop theatre. I find this an important idea to incorporate into my work because Chicago theatre is often characterized in a particular manner – the "Chicago Style." It is also assumed that this style was always present – that Chicago's Off-Loop theatre was always about contemporary realism played in an emotional and visceral manner. Julie Jackson's "Not Just Rock 'N' Roll: Chicago Theatre, 1984-1990" (*Theatre History Studies*, 2017) gives some valuable context and analysis for Chicago's brand of stage realism that emerged in the 1970s and '80s. In actuality, the early Off-Loop theatre scene was highly experimental, but this type

of work declined and largely disappeared from the Off-Loop theatre scene in the mid-1970s, with the ascendance of David Mamet's St. Nicholas Theatre, and Steppenwolf - groups that Christensen helped to bring to prominence. Christensen's influence has been considerable – it can easily be argued that Off-Loop theatre boomed because of his support – but it also needs to be taken into consideration that his tastes substantially limited the repertoire of the Off-Loop theatre scene. Christensen also went on to write the only published history of Chicago theatre, *A Theatre of Our Own*, so his influence is considerable.

An understanding of the history, culture, and politics of the city of Chicago is important in creating context for the theatre scene. A.J. Liebling's *Chicago: The Second City* is fundamental for understanding the origins of the "second city syndrome" – Chicago's civic inferiority complex that gave name to the Second City comedy theatre. The influence of Mayor Richard J. Daley, who led Chicago from 1955 until his death in 1976 is significant; I argue that his policies and politics literally set the stage for Off-Loop theatre. Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor's *American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard J. Daley, His Battle for Chicago and the Nation*, Roger Biles' *Richard J. Daley: Politics, Race, and the Governing of Chicago*, Eugene Kennedy's *Himself! The Life and Times of Mayor Richard J. Daley*, Milton Rakove's *We Don't Want Nobody Nobody Sent: An Oral History of the Daley Years*, and *Don't Make No Waves/Don't Back No Losers* provide insight into Daley and his regime. Off-Loop theatre was a product of the 1960s counterculture, and the 1968 Democratic convention was a catalyst for its foundation. David Farber's *Chicago '68*, and Todd Gitlin's *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media and the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* and *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* help to place the politics of the city into a national context.



The 1960s and 1970s are generally seen as an era of decline for large American cities, yet Chicago produced a thriving theatre scene as a response to disintegration and decay. An understanding of the pressures and politics faced by American cities in the late twentieth century, particularly contrasting Chicago with New York City in the 1960s and 1970s, has been essential. Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Robert Fitch's *The Assassination of New York*, Roger Starr's *The Rise and Fall of New York City*, and *Power Failure: New York City Politics and Policy Since 1960* by Charles Brecher and Raymond D. Horton have been helpful, particularly when considered against the literature on Richard J. Daley. Despite Daley's many faults, I argue that he maintained Chicago as a livable city at a time when New York was bankrupt and becoming increasingly unlivable and unpleasant for people at the bottom of the economic ladder – such as recent graduates from college theatre programs. As a result, I draw that conclusion that Chicago emerged as a viable alternative to New York City for theatre artists in the early 1970s – the point at which the Off-Loop theatre scene boomed.

It is also important to frame Chicago's theatre scene within a national context. Three books create a picture of the state of American theatre in the 1960s and early 1970s: Gerald M. Berkowitz's *New Broadways: Theatre Across America, 1950-1980*, Stephen J. Bottoms' *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-off-Broadway Movement and Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage* by Joseph Wesley Zeigler. Berkowitz and Zeigler's books provide an overview of the regional theatre movement. Bottoms traces the movement of New York's alternative and experimental fringe, which shifted further away from the commercial Broadway idea in the 1950s and early 1960s, driven by economics and a lack of opportunity for young artists – first to Off-Broadway then to Off-Off-Broadway.

By the late 1960s, the Off-Off-Broadway scene was becoming commercialized and an overcrowded field. Bottoms' work leads me to the conclusion that the experimental fringe that had been represented by Off-Off-Broadway, figuratively moved right out of town and on to Chicago in the early 1970s. What becomes clear is that Chicago's Off-Loop theatre took on the role of being a site of innovation and experimentation from Off-Off-Broadway in the late 1960s, and quickly adopted the institutional focus and outlook of theatres connected to the regional theatre movement in the 1970s. The regional theatre movement never gained much traction in Chicago. However, in 1966 Mayor Daley's Committee for Economic and Cultural Development issued a report entitled "A Program for the Arts in Chicago" which proposed a Guthrie-style repertory theatre for downtown Chicago. This report and the various responses it elicited within the press and throughout the community help in understanding the mindset of Chicago's artistic and philanthropic "establishment" at the time, making the fact that a viable non-profit theatre developed in the city all the more remarkable.

In terms of theory, I am relying on Pierre Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, and related works, and Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* in discussing my theory of the Steppenwolf Scenario. Using a sociological perspective, this study will treat Off-Loop theatre as a culture and examine how it operates and perpetuates itself over time. Finally, because there are relatively few books on Chicago theatre, the bulk of my research concerning theatre companies comes from archives at the Harold Washington Library, the Newberry Library, and the Chicago History Museum, as well as newspapers: the *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Chicago Daily News*, the *Chicago Reader*, *New City*, and *Time Out Chicago*.

## The Steppenwolf Scenario and the Habitus of Chicago's Off-Loop Theatre Community

There is a tendency to trace the origins of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre scene – the non-profit, non-commercial theatre that has essentially come to describe nearly the *entire* theatre scene in the city today - to 1969, when the Body Politic space was founded by Rev. Jim Shiflett and Paul Sills, and the Kingston Mines company was started by June Pyskacek.<sup>59</sup> As Gray and Gleason establish in their respective dissertations, what we now refer to as the Off-Loop theatre scene began in earnest with the establishment of Body Politic as a community arts center; it was an artistic response to an unpopular urban renewal plan perpetrated on the Lincoln Park neighborhood in the 1960s.<sup>60</sup> Kingston Mines opened almost simultaneously in 1969, and in 1970, Stuart Gordon's Organic Theatre moved to Chicago. A theatrical "scene" emerged on Lincoln Ave.<sup>61</sup>

The founding of these three spaces/organizations seemed to establish the boundaries of a community. Body Politic was at this time a performance space and incubator for other performance groups, located in a former industrial space and bowling alley. The Organic Theatre – which began in Madison, WI - was an early tenant.<sup>62</sup> Kingston Mines was both a theatre company and a performance space, located down the street in a former trolley barn. The nature of this community, based as it was in the counterculture of the 1960s, was inclusive, experimental, and welcoming. It appeared in the aftermath of the 1968 Democratic Convention, an historical moment that changed the city itself. This new "hippie" theatre

---

<sup>59</sup> Gray 9.

<sup>60</sup> Gleason iv.

<sup>61</sup> Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 161.

<sup>62</sup> Gray 150.

scene's inclusiveness contributed to other theatres developing. Some of these grew quickly into institutions: 1974 saw the founding of Wisdom Bridge, Northlight, Victory Gardens, and St. Nicholas Theatres, along with numerous others.<sup>63</sup> This wave begat subsequent waves of theatres formed by young artists banding together with their college friends and performing in storefront spaces.<sup>64</sup>

In the 1970s, a definite pattern emerged: it was replayed in successive waves through the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and continues to the present. This pattern – recent college graduates move to Chicago and form their own theatre company - is what I refer to as the Steppenwolf Scenario. Taylor states that scenarios are “meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes.” The Steppenwolf Scenario certainly does this: it determines in many respects the way theatre is practiced in Chicago. With regard to scenarios, Taylor adds: “Its portable framework bears the weight of accumulative repeats. The scenario makes visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes.”<sup>65</sup>

If one takes the founding of Body Politic in 1969 as the starting point of Off-Loop theatre's developmental period, and considers Steppenwolf's rise to national prominence in the early 1980s as its end, then the habitus appears to have developed within a span of fifteen years. However, I believe the habitus of Chicago's theatre community runs much deeper, and is rooted in practices and ideas – dispositions - that began at the end of the nineteenth century

---

<sup>63</sup> Gray 30.

<sup>64</sup> Parsi and Piatt n. pag.

<sup>65</sup> Taylor 28.

and evolved over time, only to be fully expressed in what has been called the “Off-Loop Theatre Explosion” that came to the fore in the mid-1970s.<sup>66</sup> In Bourdieu’s work, the idea of dispositions, like habitus itself, is never clearly defined. Richard Jenkins, in *Pierre Bourdieu*, states,

They might be no more than “attitudes,” and indeed have often been understood as such. (. . .) More plausible is a broader interpretation which includes a spectrum of cognitive and affective factors: thinking and feeling, to use Bourdieu’s own formulation, everything from classificatory strategies to the sense of honour.<sup>67</sup>

For this study, I also consider dispositions as values – in regards to Off-Loop theatre, these values include such things as a tendency to value community, collegiality, ensemble, hard work, perseverance. There is also a long-established propensity towards small stages in converted spaces – this is rooted in the practical realities of producing theatre in Chicago. Finally, the small stages and close quarters have driven the aesthetic towards contemporary and realistic plays. A distinctive “Chicago style” of theatre came to national attention in the 1980s.

Because these qualities are valued and favored; i.e., “keeping the ensemble together” and “succeeding as a group,” they dictate certain practices and choices in the quest to attain them. Bourdieu terms his work *Theory of Practice* for a reason – the practices of habitus-holders are structured by these values. Jenkins states:

---

<sup>66</sup> Gray 1.

<sup>67</sup> Jenkins 76.

... the habitus *disposes* actors to do certain things, it provides a *basis* for the generation of practices. Practices are produced in and by the encounter between the habitus and its dispositions, on the one hand, and the constraints, demands and opportunities of the social field or market to which the habitus is appropriate or within which the actor is moving, on the other.<sup>68</sup>

The Steppenwolf Scenario came from somewhere, from an underlying habitus that favored certain dispositions: ensemble, community, inclusivity, collegiality. These are vague terms and it is sometimes unclear *how* these qualities or values were handed down from one era to the next; but in looking through the history that predates Off-Loop theatre, it becomes clear that these qualities *were* present in the non-profit, non-commercial theatres that preceded Off-Loop. Once these qualities have been enacted, they are available – part of the *repertoire* – and can then be reperformed.<sup>69</sup> While the qualities might seem vague and the lines of historical transmission may seem fuzzy, Bourdieu states that “habitus is in cahoots with the fuzzy and the vague.”<sup>70</sup> This study looks at “the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes” that predate Off-Loop theatre and contributed to the habitus: one way in which this habitus expresses and reproduces itself is through the Steppenwolf Scenario.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Jenkins 78.

<sup>69</sup> Taylor 3.

<sup>70</sup> Bourdieu and Wacquant 22.

<sup>71</sup> Taylor 28.

## CHAPTER 2: 1890s – WORLD WAR I

The economic and social landscape of the city of Chicago at the beginning of the century, as well as the condition of the commercial theatre, created the conditions that gave rise to the earliest efforts to create an alternative theatre. Chicago was a boom town: it was incorporated as a village in 1833, with a population of 350 people.<sup>72</sup> In 1860, it had 12,172 inhabitants, and in 1870, less than forty years after its founding, it had nearly tripled in size to 299,000 residents and was the nation's fifth largest city.<sup>73</sup> Because of its location, the city became a transportation hub, first for the Great Lakes, and later the railroads: and as a result of its access to transportation became a center of manufacturing, meat packing, food processing, and commercial trade for the center of the country.<sup>74</sup> This period of exponential growth was punctuated by the Great Fire in October 1871, which destroyed three-and-half square miles of the city, killed 300 people, and left about one-third of the population homeless. In the aftermath of this destruction, the city famously found its motto, "I Will."<sup>75</sup> Chicago rebuilt, bigger and better than before, and in 1890, Chicago became America's second largest city, a position it held until 1990.<sup>76</sup>

Despite the city's rapid growth, it lacked cultural amenities and was considered a rough and uncivilized place compared to the cities of the Eastern seaboard. In the 1880s and 1890s,

---

<sup>72</sup> Czechowski, Jan Charles. "Art and Commerce: Chicago Theatre 1900 – 1920." Diss. U of Michigan, 1982. Ann Arbor: ProQuest. Web. 16 May 2018. Print. 30.

<sup>73</sup> Boehm, Lisa Beth Krissoff. *Popular Culture and the Enduring Myth of Chicago, 1871 – 1968*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Dryden, Wilma June. "Chicago Theatre as Reflected in the Newspapers 1900 – 1904." Diss. U of Illinois, 1961. Print. 6.

<sup>75</sup> Bukowski, Doug. "City Spurns Its Old Symbols: Has 'I Will' Become 'I Want?'" *Chicago Tribune* Nov 09 1999: 1. ProQuest. Web. 4 June 2018..

<sup>76</sup> Boehm 2.

Chicago was aggressively developing educational and cultural institutions to befit its growth in population, wealth, and industrialization. The Chicago Public Library opened in 1873, and moved to a new building in 1894. Chicago also boasted two private libraries – the Newberry and the Crerar, that opened in 1885 and 1897 respectively. The University of Chicago was established in 1891. The Art Institute was chartered in 1879, grew significantly after 1882, and moved to its present location in 1893. The Auditorium Theatre, designed by Adler and Sullivan, opened in 1889; it was intended to reflect both Chicago's wealth and prestige as a city, as well as the democratic ideal that art was for all. Next door, the Fine Arts Building opened its doors in 1896, the first high-rise arts colony.<sup>77</sup> In 1891, the newly formed Chicago Symphony gave its first concert at the Auditorium, and opened its own space, Orchestra Hall, in 1904.<sup>78</sup> Finally, the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition showcased the city's spectacular recovery from the Great Fire of 1871.

Chicago's cultural renaissance in the early twentieth century was the direct result of the fortunes earned in the factories, slaughterhouses, and rail yards in the nineteenth century. Establishing and supporting the cultural institutions of the city was a way for the city's wealthiest families – the Fields, the Palmers, the Armours, the McCormicks, et. al., - to display their wealth. However, Donald F. Tingley notes, "The wealthy of Chicago supported the arts much as did their counterparts in New York. Yet because there were fewer rich families in

---

<sup>77</sup> Swan, David, Elia Wilkinson and Ralph Fletcher Seymour, eds. *The Book Of The Fine Arts Building: A Facsimile Edition Of The Original Monograph*. Chicago: Hyoogen Press, 2008. Print. 2.

<sup>78</sup> Dryden 16 – 18.



Chicago, frequently the same names showed up as sponsors of the symphony, the opera, the Art Institute, and *Poetry* magazine, as well as the Little Theatre”<sup>79</sup>

Chicago had been essentially a frontier town until near the end of the nineteenth century; at the dawn of the twentieth century, it was an artistic and intellectual frontier. It became the locus of the cutting edge of American thought and intellectual life. Tingley notes that the growth in large cultural institutions helped to spur the Chicago Literary Renaissance, which included such writers as Vachel Lindsay, Edgar Lee Masters, Carl Sandburg, Maxwell Bodenheim, Eunice Tietjens, Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Floyd Dell, and Ben Hecht. Several influential literary magazines gave the Chicago writers a forum: Margaret Anderson’s *Little Review*, Francis Fisher Browne’s *The Dial*, and Harriet Monroe’s *Poetry* magazine gave the Chicago writers and poets a forum.<sup>80</sup> That most of these publications were headquartered in the Fine Arts Building, home of the Chicago Little Theatre between 1912 and 1915, is not coincidental – the Little Theatre was the theatrical expression of Chicago’s literary renaissance.

The rapid growth and development in the humanities, literature, music and visual arts did not directly or easily correspond to the city’s theatre. In his 1982 dissertation, *Art and Commerce: Chicago Theatre 1900 – 1920*, Jan Charles Czechowski traces the development of the art theatre movement against the commercial theatre at the time. While it was popular and well-attended, it generally appealed to the lowest common denominator. Czechowski offers this snapshot of Chicago’s theatre at the dawn of the twentieth century.

---

<sup>79</sup> Tingley, Donald F. "Ellen Van Volkenburg, Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre." *Illinois Historical Journal* 80.3 (1987): 130-146. Print. 133-34.

<sup>80</sup> Tingley 132.

On November 27, 1899 at the nineteen theatres listed in the *Chicago Tribune*, four attractions were listed simply as “Vaudeville,” two as “Burlesque,” twelve performances were titled, and one was listed as ‘Robert Fitzsimmons & Company;’ exactly what Roberts Fitzsimmons & Company did is unclear! Among the plays to be seen that week were *The Rounders*, Sardou’s *Diplomacy*, *The Ameer*, *Pawn Ticket No. 210*, and Clyde Fitch’s *Nathan Hale*. The authors of an entertainment called *The King of the Opium Ring* explained in a program note that they had made no attempt “to introduce high art,” but were careful “to discourage vice and offer no offense to the morals.” General entertainment fare comprised such amusements as *The Battle of Manila* – “Realistically Staged Every Hour!” – or vaudeville farces like *Kelly’s Kids* in which the popular favorite was “an individual who played four mouth organs at the same time.” The remainder of the 1899 – 1900 season would also see such luminaries as Henry Irving and Ellen Terry touring with the London Lyceum Company, Minnie Maddern Fiske in *Becky Sharp*, and Mr. and Mrs. Kendal in Sydney Grundy’s *The Greatest of These*. In the forty weeks of this turn-of-the-century season, eighty-six plays were presented just at the four major downtown theatres: the Powers, Grand Opera House, Lyric, and McVicker’s. Of these, forty-four were new to Chicago.<sup>81</sup>

This gives a sense of both the size and scope of Chicago’s commercial theatre offerings: stars, sensation, spectacle, and melodrama. Chicago was the largest theatre market outside of New

---

<sup>81</sup> Czechowski 34 – 5.

York City, and the city's relatively mild summer climate made year-round performances possible in an era before air conditioning.<sup>82</sup> Czechowski cites a contemporary newspaper source that stated that the 1899-1900 season in Chicago was the most profitable to date.

Chicago's commercial theatre was almost entirely under the control of the Theatrical Syndicate, an organization formed by a small group of theatrical producers and booking agents in 1896. It quickly became a monopoly which controlled bookings for both theatres and touring artists; by 1903, the Syndicate held over 500 theatres around the country. It exerted hegemonic control: working outside of the Syndicate was nearly impossible. The Syndicate was held responsible for the poor quality of playwriting and acting at the time, as plays tailored to the particular and often limited talents of established stars became a staple. In 1903, a rival organization headed by the Shubert Brothers arose, and the American commercial theatre came to be a battle between two rival monopolies. Their competition led to overproduction as the two monopolies built more and bigger theatres in an attempt to outdo one another, creating an oversupply of theatre seats. The emphasis on the bottom line led to low artistic standards and poor quality, as well as soaring production costs.<sup>83</sup>

Czechowski notes that the 1909-1910 season was marked by several commercial failures in Chicago. Chicago critics such as W.L. Hubbard laid the blame squarely on commercialism; “. . . we are in the hands of managerial powers who care not a whit for the artistic or the worthy – who regard the monetary as the sole aim, and who justify themselves with the statement that

---

<sup>82</sup> Czechowski 33.

<sup>83</sup> Czechowski 13.

they give the public whatever it wants.”<sup>84</sup> In giving the audience what it wanted, the commercial theatre inadvertently created a perceived need for an alternative – a theatre based on art and ideas rather than commercial interests. Czechowski observes that as theatre managers and producers attempted to give the public the spectacle, stars, and sensation that they demanded, the notion of quantity rather than quality drove their audience away: smaller and lower-priced neighborhood theatres presenting vaudeville came to be competition for the large downtown venues. Since the audience perceived the general quality of theatre to be *uniformly* low, they no longer saw a need to travel downtown to see it.<sup>85</sup>

A push to reform or “uplift” the stage emerged in the early twentieth century and led to the earliest alternative theatre efforts in Chicago. Hull-House and Chicago’s other art theatre efforts of the early twentieth century can be viewed as the local iteration of a worldwide movement that began with André Antoine’s Théâtre Libre in Paris in 1887 and led to Otto Brahm’s Die Freie Bühne in Germany, J.T. Grein’s Independent Theatre in London in 1894, and the Moscow Art Theatre, founded in 1898.<sup>86</sup> Chicago’s notorious “Second City” syndrome also spurred innovation, as local art theatre supporters attempted to outpace New York and other Eastern cities in terms of theatrical advancement.<sup>87</sup> Dickinson writes that:

---

<sup>84</sup> Hubbard, W. L. “Trash Usurping Place of the Drama in Chicago.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Oct. 13 1907: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.

<sup>85</sup> Czechowski 41.

<sup>86</sup> Highlander, James Lee. “An Historical Study of the New Theatre and The Robertson Players of Chicago (1906-08).” MA Thesis. U of Illinois: 1951. Print. iii.

<sup>87</sup> “Second City Syndrome” takes its name from A.J. Liebling’s 1952 book, but the idea has been around much longer, as this incident illustrates. A September 2016 article in the *Chicago Reader* defines it as “...the nagging inferiority complex that causes Chicagoans to reflexively overreact to every dig and perceived slight directed at the city, even if it’s much ado about nothing.” Smith, Ryan. “Peter Thiel and ‘The YouTube Couple’ Stir Chicago’s Second City Syndrome.” *Chicago Reader*, [www.chicagoreader.com](http://www.chicagoreader.com). N. pag. Web. 2 May 2018.

The second city of the country in size Chicago is theatrically only a provincial city. Few productions outside of the vaudeville field are made there. For its best theatrical fare the city is as much dependent upon New York as are Memphis and Madison. Now, there is in Chicago a strong creative spirit not only in business but in art and civic affairs as well. It is to be supposed that such a city would not long be content to leave unused its own inventive impulses in the theatre. The conditions that have made Chicago secondary in the field of the commercial theatre have made her a pioneer in the movement for a local theatre.<sup>88</sup>

However much it may have been desired, this was not an easy crusade. One of the men most responsible for the movement, real estate broker and arts patron Arthur Aldis, remarked in hindsight: "The dramatic uplift in Chicago might be more accurately described as a series of unrelated dramatic upheavals, each followed by its own particular collapse."<sup>89</sup>

### **Hull-House Theatre**

At the turn of the century, while Chicago's social elite established cultural and educational institutions - often for their own enjoyment - the vast majority of the city's population lived at the opposite end of the economic spectrum. Chicago was a city of recent immigrants, working at low-wage factory jobs and living in crowded and often squalid conditions. In her dissertation "Chicago Theatre as Reflected in the Newspapers 1900 – 1904," Wilma June Dryden cites a Chicago public school census from 1890 that found 68% of residents

---

<sup>88</sup> Dickinson, Thomas H. *The Insurgent Theatre*. New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1917. Print. 29.

<sup>89</sup> Aldis, Arthur T. "Adventuring in the Drama." *The Drama*, Feb. 1917. Print. 129 – 35.

were foreign-born. The first wave of immigrants came primarily from Germany, Scandinavia, and Ireland in the 1840s through the 1860s. By 1890, members of these groups were employed as skilled labor in factories and trades and becoming assimilated into mainstream American society. A second wave of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe followed beginning in 1880, and had more difficulty assimilating than previous groups. “They clustered with their fellow countrymen in cities within the city, in which each national group maintained its own language and customs. These unskilled immigrants became easy prey for the ward boss and the sweatshop agent.”<sup>90</sup> Into this milieu, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr founded the Hull-House Settlement in 1889. In 1888, Addams and Starr, friends from their student years at Rockford Female Seminary, traveled together to Europe to visit Toynbee Hall, a “settlement” in urban London. There, professional men and women “settled” in an impoverished urban neighborhood, living as neighbors with the poor, and tailoring programming and assistance in response to observed community needs. The settlement served as a social, educational and community forum for the neighborhood.

Addams and Starr returned to Chicago to establish Hull-House Settlement; the first of its kind in the US.<sup>91</sup> The women took possession of a dilapidated mansion on the near southwest side of Chicago, home to Irish and German immigrants at the time. Hull-House Settlement grew into an institution which helped to develop and refine the very idea of social work as a field. Within a decade of its founding, Hull-House grew into a twelve-building campus, featuring an art gallery, gymnasium, pool, library, kitchen facilities, and artist studios. In addition to health

---

<sup>90</sup> Dryden 7 – 8.

<sup>91</sup> Hull-House takes its name from Charles Hull, who built the mansion.

care, child care, employment assistance, and educational and social programs for all ages. It also offered art and music instruction almost from the start: theatre became a part of the offerings in 1890.<sup>92</sup>

Hull-House's theatre program would become Chicago's first art theatre; however, it did not set out with this goal. The inclusion of theatre in Hull-House's programming was an outgrowth of Addams' philosophy. In his dissertation, "Hull-House Theatre: An Analytical and Evaluative History," Stuart J. Hecht writes that Starr and Addams were influenced by the ideas of John Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle, and particularly artist and social philosopher William Morris. To Addams and Starr, the settlement's mission went beyond helping immigrants assimilate, but ultimately to relieve suffering and misery. In their view, the dehumanizing work and miserable living conditions for the urban poor were caused by industrial society. The solution was to be found in art and creativity. Starr in particular ". . . saw one of the settlement's major tasks as that of restoring art to workers' lives."<sup>93</sup>

Starr had some experience teaching art appreciation and Shakespeare at a girls' school; it was she who taught some of the first theatre classes to be offered, but it was Addams who recognized the potential for theatre to further Hull-House's social mission. Hecht notes, "Addams decided that the theatre's power lay in its ability to provide models of moral behavior and social conduct otherwise not available to poor urban dwellers."<sup>94</sup> She recognized that what

---

<sup>92</sup> Christensen, Richard. *A Theater of Our Own: A History and Memoir of 1,001 Nights in Chicago*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2004. Print. 46.

<sup>93</sup> Hecht, Stuart Joel. *Hull-House Theatre: An Analytical and Evaluative History*. Diss. Northwestern U, 1983. ProQuest. Web. 29 June 2011. 20.

<sup>94</sup> Hecht diss. 21.

was presently available and popular at the theatre was not only inadequate to this purpose, but detrimental.

All of these young people looked upon an afternoon a week in the gallery of a Halsted Street theatre as their one opportunity to see life. The sort of melodrama they see there has recently been described as “the Ten Commandments written in red fire.” Certainly the villain always comes to a violent end, and the young and handsome hero is rewarded by marriage with a beautiful girl, usually the daughter of a millionaire, but after all that is not a portrayal of the morality of the Ten Commandments any more than of life itself.<sup>95</sup>

The commercial theatre of the day was specifically aimed at Hull-House’s constituents. Dryden, in focusing on theatre coverage in Chicago’s ten daily newspapers during the period of 1900 – 1904, concludes that “The popular theatres served sensational melodramas to industrial workers with little education and to immigrants with limited English vocabularies.”<sup>96</sup> Hull-House theatre grew into the first “art theatre” in its effort to present plays that were congruent with Jane Addams’ mission of social and moral improvement.

Theatre was introduced into Hull-House programming gradually; Hecht notes that although attending theatre was a popular activity, neighborhood residents tended to take a dim view of participating in it due to the questionable morality and low social status of theatre

---

<sup>95</sup> Addams, Jane and Todd London. "How America's First Art Theatre Came to Be." *American Theatre*, Jan. 2006: 80 – 88. Print. 82.

<sup>96</sup> Dryden 166.



people. In the mid-1890s, many of the clubs began to stage their own performances, and by 1896, a resident was designated “Dramatics Director” and charged with assisting clubs in staging their performances.<sup>97</sup> Soon Walter Pietsch, a Hull-House resident with extensive theatre training, took over this position. In 1897, plans were announced for establishing the Hull-House Dramatics Association, to be led by Pietsch. Membership was drawn from among the most skilled and accomplished performers of the other social clubs. Sixteen people were finally selected for the ensemble.<sup>98</sup>

The artistic development of the ensemble was slow since the group “. . . is composed entirely of working men and women, employed for the most part in professions not generally associated with art.”<sup>99</sup> Pelham notes that they generally rehearsed only two nights a week.<sup>100</sup> Despite these limitations, the group proved to be remarkably resilient and dedicated; setting up one of the earliest examples of the disposition towards ensemble in Chicago. Their early productions under Pietsch reflected the tastes of the neighborhood as well as the limited skills of the company: Victorien Sardou’s well-made play *A Scrap of Paper* in December 1897, Charles Dickens’ *A Cricket on the Hearth*, and Jerome K. Jerome’s one-act *Sunset* in the spring of 1898. The quality of the performance and productions seem to have steadily improved, and impressed Addams sufficiently that she agreed to raise funds to build a proper theatre for the group.<sup>101</sup> Hull-House’s theatre was completed in November 1899: a small proscenium stage

---

<sup>97</sup> Hull-House’s activities were organized as social clubs headed by Hull-House residents (social workers), and arranged around particular interests and age groups.

<sup>98</sup> Hecht diss. 22 – 27.

<sup>99</sup> Browne, Maurice. “The Hull-House Players in ‘Justice.’” *The Theatre Magazine*, Sept. 1911: 89-90. Print. 89.

<sup>100</sup> Pelham, Laura Dainty. “The Story of the Hull-House Players.” *Drama Magazine*, May 1916: 249 – 262. Print. 250.

<sup>101</sup> Pelham 249.

with seating for 230.<sup>102</sup> Pietsch's energies seem to have gone into instilling a work ethic and setting standards of quality for the group. The theatre program seems to have gone fallow following his departure in 1899, but interest among the community remained high. In October 1900, Addams appointed Laura Dainty Pelham director of the group. Pelham states that the group "... adopted the same name as its predecessor, 'The Hull-House Dramatic Association'" and that twelve young people who had "achieved distinction" either in the previous group or other clubs, were selected by Addams.<sup>103</sup> Under Pelham's leadership, which would last until her death in 1924, and acting upon Addams' wishes, the Hull-House Dramatic Association evolved from a community theatre into a true art theatre.<sup>104</sup>

Pelham had been a professional actress, known for playing soubrettes in melodramas, most notably the title role in Dion Boucicault's *Kathleen Mavourneen*, and "Sincerity Weeks" in *A Mountain Pink*, which she toured with for several years in the 1880s. Like her contemporary Anna Morgan, she was known for her dramatic staged readings, working through the Chicago-based Redpath Lyceum Bureau. In 1892, she married Fred Pelham, settled in Chicago, and became involved in the Hull-House Women's Club at some point in the late 1890s.<sup>105</sup> Pelham was somewhat reluctant to take on the group, noting that she accepted the position "with many misgivings." Her first production reflects her own cautiousness and trepidation:

---

<sup>102</sup> Hecht diss. 30.

<sup>103</sup> Pelham 250. Pelham states in the 1916 article that she was appointed director in October 1901. Hecht places it a year earlier. Hecht conducted extensive research on the Hull-House archives, while Pelham's 1916 article seems based on her own recollections. Hecht noted other date discrepancies from Pelham's accounts. Melanie N. Blood also dates Pelham's appointment to director to 1900.

<sup>104</sup> Blood, Melanie N. "Ideology and Theatre at Hull-House Under Jane Addams." *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 5.2 (1993): 71. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018. 74.

<sup>105</sup> Hecht diss. 106; Blood, "Ideology and Theatre" 75.

Our opening production was a melodrama which we chose for several reasons; the company was most familiar with that type of play; my own stage experience had been largely along such lines or work; and the neighborhood from which we expected to draw our audiences still loved the old-fashioned drama with virtue triumphing and vice suitably downed in the last act. So we began rehearsals of *A Mountain Pink* with unbounded confidence and zeal.<sup>106</sup>

The play, presented in December 1900, was successful due in no small part to Pelham's reprisal of her signature role.<sup>107</sup> It succeeded both in raising money for future productions, and at engaging the neighborhood audience.<sup>108</sup>

Over the next few seasons, the group would gradually improve their acting and stage technique.<sup>109</sup> They became noteworthy, however, for their play selections. Addams saw that theatre could be used for social reform, both in its practice and in content. Hecht notes that while Pelham's early play selections were aimed as much at pleasing local tastes as matching the skills of her players, Addams wanted Hull-House to present theatre that upheld the social ideals of the settlement. Hecht writes: "A fine drama, one consistent with the workers' lives and experiences, would serve as a healthy standard for social conduct and moral behavior. Furthermore, Addams saw the theatre as a place where the validity of accepted social 'truths' could be tested by their believability on the stage."<sup>110</sup> In her 1910 book, *Twenty Years at Hull-*

---

<sup>106</sup> Pelham 250.

<sup>107</sup> Hecht diss. 109.

<sup>108</sup> Pelham 251.

<sup>109</sup> The name was changed to the Hull-House Players in 1910. Pelham 253.

<sup>110</sup> Hecht diss. 21-22.

*House*, Addams notes, “Through such plays the stage may become a pioneer teacher of social righteousness.”<sup>111</sup>

The Hull-House actors were adult amateurs, and it took time to build their skills to the point where they could tackle Shaw, Ibsen, and Galsworthy. In their first few seasons they presented lighter fare: *Engaged* by W.S. Gilbert; Sydney Grundy’s *The Arabian Nights*; Waldauer’s *Fanchon, the Cricket*; Boucicault’s *Kathleen Mavourneen* (another Pelham vehicle); and T.W. Robertson’s *School*. Blood notes that they may have been under some pressure from Addams to present more elevated fare than the melodramas and comedies of their early seasons.<sup>112</sup> A “mile-stone” was reached with their production of Ben Jonson’s *The Sad Shepherd* in May 1904.<sup>113</sup> An unlikely choice for an amateur group, it was based on the Robin Hood story, in verse, and left unfinished at the time of Jonson’s death in 1637.<sup>114</sup> It had been produced for the first time in London in 1896 by the Elizabethan Stage Society. Hecht posits that it was selected because of Hull-House resident George Crampton, who had taken part in the 1896 London staging, and also appeared in the Hull-House production.<sup>115</sup> The play garnered the attention of local drama critics, who were impressed by the overall quality of the acting and design. *Chicago Tribune* critic W.L. Hubbard wrote, “The players last evening spoke their lines fluently, clearly, and with good understanding. For a performance by amateurs all

---

<sup>111</sup> Addams, “America’s First Art Theatre” 86.

<sup>112</sup> Blood, “Ideology and Theatre” 77.

<sup>113</sup> Pelham 252.

<sup>114</sup> Giddens, Eugene. “The Sad Shepherd: Textual Essay.” *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*. Bevington, David M., and Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson, eds.. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. Print.

<sup>115</sup> Hecht diss. 117.

moved with exceptional smoothness and rapidity. Many a company of professionals has offered less finished work. The average of the acting was high throughout...."<sup>116</sup>

*The Sad Shepherd* attracted an audience from beyond the neighborhood – a wealthier, educated, and cultured crowd. Pelham notes “. . . people from various parts of the city came to see us; but this recognition meant hard work, for our standards must again be raised, and better plays produced in smoother fashion for our new clients.”<sup>117</sup> Hecht, Blood, and others note a decided change in Hull-House’s play selection following *The Sad Shepherd*: the 1905-06 season saw productions of George Bernard Shaw’s *You Never Can Tell* and Ibsen’s *Pillars of Society*. The shift in material reflected a shift in their intended audience: Pelham notes “A change in the neighborhood, which began about this time, also left its mark on the company. Our Irish and French neighbors were being crowded out by Italians, who did not care for performances in English, and we were compelled to look elsewhere for our audience. This meant plays of a different type...”<sup>118</sup> This shift in play selection opened the door for the “new” drama in Chicago, and the work presented in the ensuing years prefigures the canon of plays and playwrights that would become a hallmark of the art theatre movement: Ibsen, Pinero, Shaw, Hauptmann, Galsworthy, Synge, and Lady Gregory.<sup>119</sup> Hecht characterizes this as a turn towards Social Realism:

The label “Social Realism” is here used to describe those plays of the era which either discussed or realistically portrayed contemporary social problems on

---

<sup>116</sup> Hubbard, W. L. "Music and the Drama." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* 12 May 1904: 6. ProQuest. Web. 16 May 2018.

<sup>117</sup> Pelham 252.

<sup>118</sup> Pelham 252.

<sup>119</sup> Blood, "Ideology and Theatre" 77.

stage, inspiring audiences to work to correct them. This form was central to the social and artistic philosophies of Jane Addams and Hull-House. In 1902 Addams wrote that the Hull-House theatre had been given over to the people. She went on to emphasize that it took time to determine what constituted suitable plays for the local audiences. Hull-House found them in Social Realism, and thereby discovered a “healthy” alternative to the “cheap” dramas Jane Addams so despised. The works of Shaw and Ibsen, given in 1905-1906, and later productions of plays by such dramatists as Galsworthy and Hauptmann, all reflected the urban industrial condition. They brought actual tenement life on stage and, in doing so, educated the audience in social and political ills. Jane Addams realized that such a message held much more power when presented by the tenement dwellers themselves.<sup>120</sup>

As the ensemble became more successful, they also became more cohesive. In the 1906-07 season, the group elected to limit its membership to fourteen, that new members had to have “played at least two parts acceptably and had proved himself to be socially agreeable to the members.” Pelham noted that these requirements seemed “rather selfish” at first, but “. . . the harmony which prevailed in our company (. . .) was a sufficient justification of the measures.”<sup>121</sup> In 1910, the group changed its name from “The Hull-House Dramatic Association” to “The Hull-House Players.” Pelham states that the name change was reflective of the groups new ambitions to present original plays; it is also indicative of its members forming

---

<sup>120</sup> Hecht diss. 119-120.

<sup>121</sup> Pelham 252.

more of a group identity and seeing themselves as a theatre company, rather than simply a social club that presented plays. These shifts – limiting and codifying membership and changing their name - coincide with their productions of the new drama coming out of Europe. The Hull-House Players were perhaps experiencing the first case of wanting to be “the next Steppenwolf” – although *their* desire was to be the next Abbey Theatre of Ireland.

In 1911, they staged the American premiere of John Galsworthy’s *Justice*. “The drama protested modern social injustices and poverty, the kinds of concerns held by the Hull-House actors themselves, and the neighborhood they represented.”<sup>122</sup> The play garnered a great deal of critical attention, both because of its topic and for the high quality of the production. Maurice Browne, who would establish the Chicago Little Theatre in 1912, gave the show a glowing review in *Theatre Magazine*, “The production of the play was simple to the point of shabbiness and occasionally inaccurate. (. . .) but, if the actors had played in their shirtsleeves on bare boards, the effect would have been the same, for they did not act the play – they lived it..”<sup>123</sup> As Browne recognized in his review, Hull-House succeeded in producing what was becoming known as “the new drama” where others had failed – and by 1912, Chicago had already seen several high-profile art theatre failures — because they were free from commercial concerns, and therefore under less pressure to succeed in the first place.<sup>124</sup>

Hull-House turned its attentions to Irish drama in June 1911.<sup>125</sup> Lady Gregory’s *The Rising of the Moon* and John Masefield’s *The Tragedy of Nan* were followed in 1912 by a

---

<sup>122</sup> Hecht diss. 123.

<sup>123</sup> Browne, “The Hull-House Players in ‘Justice’” 90.

<sup>124</sup> Hecht diss. 126.

<sup>125</sup> Blood, “Ideology and Theatre” 77.

program of four one-acts: Gregory's *The Workhouse Ward*, *Spreading the News*, a remount of *The Rising of the Moon*, and Synge's *Riders to the Sea*. Pelham partially credited the success to the fact that six of the ensemble members were Irish.<sup>126</sup> The Irish Players toured the U.S. in 1912, "... spreading the ideal of naturalness and simplicity," playing Chicago in February.<sup>127</sup> During their Chicago engagement, the two companies became acquainted with one another: the Hull-House Players attended opening night and met Lady Gregory; Gregory and her company members attended a Hull-House performance later that week. At some point during the visit, Gregory invited the Hull-House Players to visit them in Dublin. While this invitation may have been a mere courtesy on Gregory's part, the Hull-House Players spent the 1912-13 season fundraising for the trip. In June 1913, the Players sailed for Europe.<sup>128</sup> They were invited to perform for Lady Aberdeen in Ireland, toured the Abbey Theatre, spent time with the Irish Players in London, met Harley Granville-Barker and John Galsworthy, and also visited Stratford, Paris, Amsterdam, and Antwerp.<sup>129</sup>

The European adventure was eye-opening, and the connection with the Irish Players appears to have inspired the ensemble to a greater commitment to their craft. "The influence of the Abbey Theatre on American theatre in general and on Hull-House specifically was great. The Hull-House Players admired the Irish style of playing, the amateur commitment, and, perhaps most important, the dedication to creating a national drama."<sup>130</sup> However, once back

---

<sup>126</sup> Pelham 255.

<sup>127</sup> Dickinson 60.

<sup>128</sup> Hecht diss. 131.

<sup>129</sup> The Irish Players were appearing in London during the Hull-House Players visit to Ireland.

<sup>130</sup> Blood, "Ideology and Theatre" 77-8.



home, dissent emerged within the ensemble.<sup>131</sup> As the company worked on their 1913-14 season, the ensemble came to find fault with Pelham's leadership: her direction and tastes now seemed old-fashioned and outdated. Ensemble members began to demand a greater say in the direction of the company; they wanted the group to focus on American plays.<sup>132</sup> Pelham tried to squelch the dissent, but while she was on a trip to Europe, the Players staged a coup and issued a series of press releases announcing a playwriting competition, a new director for the group, and even produced an evening of one-acts.<sup>133</sup> Pelham quickly reasserted control of the group upon her return, but the Players appealed to Addams, who rather uncharacteristically sided with Pelham in the matter.<sup>134</sup> With Pelham back in control, seven of the ensemble's fourteen members left the company.<sup>135</sup> Although their positions were quickly filled from a waiting list and the group continued, it was never the same. Hecht notes that reviews following the "players rebellion" indicate that the quality of acting declined, and the sense of ensemble was missing. "While particular productions earned recognition, the Players never again achieved the level of artistic success which had led to their Irish trip."<sup>136</sup> Pelham continued to lead the group until her death in 1924. The history of the group in the period between the world wars will be dealt with more specifically later.

With regards to the dispositions that contributed to the habitus of Off-Loop theatre, Hull-House introduced the idea of alternative theatre to Chicago, and the world. In his 1917

---

<sup>131</sup> Hecht diss. 136.

<sup>132</sup> Hecht diss. 137.

<sup>133</sup> Blood, "Ideology and Theatre" 81.

<sup>134</sup> Blood, "Ideology and Theatre" 79.

<sup>135</sup> Hecht diss. 144.

<sup>136</sup> Hecht diss. 144.

book on the new movements in non-commercial theatre, Thomas H. Dickinson calls the Hull-House Players “. . . the first ‘new’ theatre company in America.”<sup>137</sup> Because they were not under the kinds of critical and financial pressures which would prove fatal to other art theatre efforts in Chicago, Hull-House was free to innovate and experiment. Addams’ social mission influenced the type of plays presented, which led to a focus on European drama, “problem” plays and social realism; and by doing so, Hull-House offered audiences an alternative to commercial theatre at a time when there essentially were no alternatives. Because the stakes were low, it was acceptable to take risks – this would become one of the central dispositions of Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre.

Hull-House also enacted the idea of theatre produced by and for the Chicago community, and forwarded the notion of theatre having a working-class, blue-collar ethos. This originated in the social mission of Hull-House – Addams wanted her poor, urban, immigrant constituency to examine their lives and conditions, and she saw theatre as an effective way to do this. This particular quality has transferred over and has come to define Off-Loop theatre: that of being both *of* and *for* a community. Further, Addams’ deployment of theatre as a means to speak to the issues of the working-class enacted a defining quality of Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre: it is often characterized as having a blue-collar, working-class aesthetic. While these qualities show roots in the Hull-House Players, it is somewhat disingenuous. Beginning with *The Sad Shepherd* in 1904, Hull-House began to attract an audience from beyond the Halsted St. neighborhood. This was driven by necessity: the demographics of the Hull-House neighborhood

---

<sup>137</sup> Dickinson 61.

changed; from Irish and French to Italians, while the makeup of the company remained the same. Pelham notes the Italians “did not care for performances in English, and we were compelled to look elsewhere for an audience.”<sup>138</sup>

Rather than reflect the reality of the Hull-House neighborhood, the Players and their choice of material were instruments of Jane Addams’ ideology of social reform. Addams disliked melodrama and approved of plays that somehow reflected or resonated with conditions of the neighborhood. Hecht states:

The works of Shaw and Ibsen, given in 1905 – 1906, and later productions of plays by such dramatists as Galsworthy and Hauptmann, all reflected the urban industrial condition. They brought actual tenement life on stage and, in doing so, educated the audience in social and political ills. Jane Addams realized that such a message holds much more power when presented by the tenement dwellers themselves.<sup>139</sup>

Addams utilized the Players to engage an upper-class audience. “Addams invited the settlement’s philanthropists to Players’ productions, and soon their work became more popular with wealthy North Shore audiences than with the Halsted Street community.”<sup>140</sup> Thus, the disposition for a blue-collar, working-class ethos on the stage had deep roots, but is not reflective of the audience: in Addams’ day, as now, the audiences for theatre are still drawn

---

<sup>138</sup> Pelham 252.

<sup>139</sup> Hecht diss. 120.

<sup>140</sup> Blood, Melanie N. "Theatre in Settlement Houses: Hull-House Players, Neighborhood Playhouse, and Karamu Theatre." *Theatre History Studies* 16 (1996): 45. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018. 54.

largely from the upper classes. This quality carried forward and became one of the dispositions for the Off-Loop theatre scene in the 1970s.

Finally, Hull-House demonstrated the power of ensemble. The group of players that challenged their artistic director in 1914 was largely the same group Pelham convened in 1900. The ensemble had learned their craft together, and understandably grew closer over time. They grew to be so invested in their group identity that they fought for self-determination. The Hull-House Players demonstrated the power of ensemble, both the positive aspects – together they created great art, and the negative – group dynamics within an ensemble can become divisive. The loss of the sense of ensemble following the rebellion was widely noted at the time. The disposition of ensemble – in terms of both organization and playing style - has become a defining characteristic of Off-Loop theatre. Subsequent theatre history in Chicago is frequently the story of ensembles rather than individuals, and the histories of individual theatre companies are frequently a litany of the struggles and challenges of becoming and remaining an ensemble.

### **Anna Morgan**

The beginnings of the art theatre movement in Chicago owe a great deal to two women: Laura Dainty Pelham and Anna Morgan. Both had stage careers as elocutionists or “readers,” doing platform readings of prose and poetry.<sup>141</sup> Pelham also had a career in melodrama before leading Hull-House theatre: her turn towards the “new drama” appears to have been driven by Jane Addams’ desire to use the stage as a platform for social issues, rather than personal

---

<sup>141</sup> “Chicago Elocutionists: Teachers Who Give the Young Idea the Proper Trend.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Aug 14, 1887: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 18 May 2018.

convictions. As much as Hull-House theatre came to serve as a laboratory for the early art theatre scene in Chicago - a place where art theatre was put into practice - Anna Morgan is responsible for cultivating an aesthetic, fostering an informed audience, and training some of the most influential practitioners for the new drama. While Pelham's work at Hull-House engaged those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, Morgan's efforts were focused on developing artists and cultivating audiences at the top.

Morgan was born in Auburn, NY in 1854, one of five children. The family moved to Chicago following the death of her father in 1876, and Morgan studied elocution at the Hershey School of Musical Art in Chicago beginning in 1877. She made her debut as a "reader," doing dramatic readings and recitals of prose and poetry on the Redpath Lyceum circuit in the late 1870s and early 1880s.<sup>142</sup> Pelham was one of her colleagues on this circuit.<sup>143</sup>

Morgan admits that she initially went onstage primarily for financial reasons:

I (. . .) was eager to enter upon a career of my own, which in a measure accounts for the readiness with which I acted upon my friend's advice to become a "reader" as she called it. I had had no preparation for a public career, had lived very quietly in Auburn and the country about it, had attended few lectures, concerts or plays; in fact, I think I had only attended two plays – "Fanchon the Cricket" and "Jane Eyre" – but from the departure from my home and the taking of my first lesson I seemed to have been imbued with the determination to succeed, not so much to win renown as to become independent financially and

---

<sup>142</sup> Sozen, Joyce Lorraine Chalcraft. "Anna Morgan: Reader, Teacher, And Director." Diss. U of Illinois, 1961. Print. 4.

<sup>143</sup> Morgan, Anna. *My Chicago*. Chicago: Ralph Fletcher Seymour, 1918. Print. 22.

to be able to help others who might need my help. So I worked with unflagging interest and a steady determination, which was never deterred by the innumerable obstacles which everyone who sets out on an artistic career is bound to encounter.<sup>144</sup>

Unlike Pelham, Morgan's career was limited solely to the Lyceum stage. She began teaching "elocution, physical culture, and general deportment on the stage" at the Chicago Conservatory in 1884.<sup>145</sup>

Morgan became an authority on the Delsarte Method of movement and expression, "...that popular but often ridiculed system of training in vogue between 1870 and 1900."<sup>146</sup> It was created by François Delsarte as "a system of 'Applied Aesthetics' in which physical and vocal gestures for the orator were codified in terms of a simple, extensive, highly unified pattern."<sup>147</sup> It became a popular form of actor training around the turn of the century, but was also used in speech and movement training for the general public. Sozen notes that Delsarte never wrote his system down; actor and director Steele MacKaye studied with Delsarte and began lecturing on the topic in the US. "Morgan was impressed by reports of MacKaye's lectures, and by the fact that students paid him \$20 an hour for instruction in the Delsarte Method. She interviewed MacKaye, secured the translations of Delsarte's lessons written by his pupils, and began to teach the Delsarte Method."<sup>148</sup> Morgan published: *An Hour with Delsarte*

---

<sup>144</sup> Sozen 25.

<sup>145</sup> "Chicago Elocutionists." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922).

<sup>146</sup> Sozen 38.

<sup>147</sup> Kirby, E.T. "The Delsarte Method: 3 Frontiers of Actor Training." *The Drama Review: TDR* 16.1 (1972): 55-69. Print. 55.

<sup>148</sup> Sozen 39.

in 1890, and *The Art of Speech and Deportment* in 1909. Her students included some who were preparing for careers on the stage, but the majority were young women from well-off families, hoping to learn the social graces. An 1888 article recounts a recital by a class of young society women enacting such emotions as “vindication,” “adoration,” and “bashfulness,” using stock movements, gestures and facial expressions. Morgan stresses that the purpose is not to train them for the stage, but to give “ease and freedom of movement” and “to be graceful.”<sup>149</sup>

At the Chicago Conservatory, Morgan frequently directed productions which ranged from evenings of monologues and scenes to fully staged plays, depending on the abilities of the students. Some of these productions pointed towards Morgan’s interest in the new drama coming out of Europe: in 1892, the Conservatory staged a production of Ibsen’s *The Pillars of Society*, although it is not clear if Morgan directed.<sup>150</sup> She directed Ibsen’s *The Master Builder* on March 21, 1895 at Hooley’s Theatre.<sup>151</sup> This production also involved students from the Conservatory, but clearly meant a great deal to her: she states that it had “an ideal cast.”<sup>152</sup> Unfortunately, the regular drama critic for the *Tribune*, who was favorably disposed towards Ibsen, was unable to review it, and his substitute – Barrett Eastman - savaged the play and playwright. Morgan remained bitter about this for decades; in her 1918 autobiography, she wrote: “Altogether it was an event of dramatic importance in Chicago, and was truly appreciated by the small number who at the time knew something of Ibsen and who at least partially realized what an important share he was to have in the evolution of the drama.”

---

<sup>149</sup> “Disciples of Delsarte: The Modjeskas and Bernhardtts of the Future.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Feb 19, 1888: 25. *ProQuest*. Web. 18 May 2018.

<sup>150</sup> Sozen 69

<sup>151</sup> “Amusements.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Mar 22, 1895: 8. *ProQuest*. Web 18 May 2018.

<sup>152</sup> Morgan 44.

Morgan was a popular figure in Chicago at the time, but in championing the “new drama” found herself the object of ridicule by the theatre critics. She seemed unable to weather the critique without having the last word. In *My Chicago*, written nearly 25 years later, she states, “I have dwelt at length on this, because I wish to record the lack of appreciation and encouragement I encountered from our critics on this and subsequent occasions.”<sup>153</sup>

Undaunted, Morgan made another attempt at producing the new drama in February 1896, with Maurice Maeterlinck’s *The Intruder*.<sup>154</sup> Morgan was so taken with Maeterlinck’s work that she sought out and met the writer during a trip to Europe.<sup>155</sup> She was meticulous in rehearsing the play, again using her conservatory students “. . . although the play required less than thirty minutes in performance I continued work on it for three months.”<sup>156</sup> Despite having one of her actors fall ill at the last minute and have to be replaced, the show went on. Again, the press was not receptive: “The newspaper men for the most part sat on the back seats and grinned, regarding both it and me as being ‘queer.’”<sup>157</sup>

In 1898, Morgan left the Chicago Conservatory and started her own studio: originally called the School of Expression, it was generally known as the Anna Morgan Studios, and operated until her retirement in 1925.<sup>158</sup> It quickly became the place for Chicago’s wealthy, progressive, and upwardly mobile to send their sons and soon-to-be debutante daughters to obtain social polish. Sozen states that Morgan’s aim was not to train performers, but “. . . to

---

<sup>153</sup> Morgan 45.

<sup>154</sup> “Given the Name ‘High Bohemia’: Great Interest in Miss Anna Morgan’s Studio Teas.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Feb 16, 1896: 12. *ProQuest*. Web. 18 May 2018.

<sup>155</sup> Morgan 46.

<sup>156</sup> Morgan 47.

<sup>157</sup> Morgan 48.

<sup>158</sup> Sozen 5.



give students social poise, and wide knowledge and appreciation of literature and the arts, so they could gain more pleasure from life. Her instruction was not primarily dramatic instruction, but 'cultural' instruction."<sup>159</sup> Her studio was located on the eighth floor of the newly opened Fine Arts Building, at 410 S. Michigan Avenue, and the location of her studio is significant.

The Fine Arts Building was built in 1886 for the Studebaker Brothers, as a showroom and workshop for their horse-drawn carriage manufacturing business.<sup>160</sup> By 1896, the Studebaker's had outgrown the space and moved. The building sits next door to the Auditorium theatre building, and across the street from the Art Institute. Music business impresario Charles C. Curtiss had observed that "Artistic endeavors needed ample and inexpensive, yet conveniently located, space to accommodate patrons. Moreover, Curtiss had realized that the arts attracted one another."<sup>161</sup> He convinced the Studebakers to convert the building into the first high-rise arts colony, and name him manager of the enterprise. The Fine Arts Building contained office, studio, workshop, and retail space geared towards artists, and quickly became home to Chicago's painters, sculptors, musicians, architects, writers, publishers, illustrators, book-binders, book stores, musical instrument repair and sales, sheet music publishers, piano showrooms and photographers. The building also came to be headquarters for several prominent social clubs and service organizations, with members drawn from Chicago's upper classes - such as the Chicago Woman's Club, the Fortnightly, the Cordon Club, the Caxton Club, Catholic Women's League, the D.A.R., Alliance Française, and the Illinois Equal Suffrage

---

<sup>159</sup> Sozen 37.

<sup>160</sup> Swan n. pag.

<sup>161</sup> Duis, Perry R. "Where Is Athens Now?": The Fine Arts Building 1898 to 1918." *Chicago History* 6.2 (1977): 66-78. Print. 68.

Association. There were also two large performance venues on the main floor. The Fine Arts Building brought together Chicago's working artistic community with its moneyed and leisure classes, putting artists and potential patrons in close proximity.<sup>162</sup>

Morgan enjoyed this scene immensely:

In the beginning years of The Fine Arts Building there was a blending of the social with the artistic life in the studios that was truly delightful. We were all prosperous, with plenty of work to do, yet somehow there seemed to be time to exchange visits with our co-workers and take an active interest in the work which each was doing. Visitors were frequent; almost any day we were sure to see a group of Chicago friends who were entertaining out-of-town guests by bringing them to The Fine Arts Building and its attractive studios. It was a show place in the town, a rendezvous where you were sure to see interesting people. The samovar was in daily service between the hours of four and seven, and for few years it was almost a continuous party.<sup>163</sup>

Morgan was at the center of Chicago's gilded age "bohemia" – her clients were the wealthy, and her colleagues were the writers, artists, and other progressive thinkers of her day. This combination – of the wealthy and the socially progressive - would be a defining characteristic of the art theatre movement.

---

<sup>162</sup> Duis 69; Swan n. pag.

<sup>163</sup> Morgan 61.

Chicago at the turn of the century was regarded as little more than a booming frontier town; good at butchering hogs and catalog sales, but seriously lacking refinement and culture - a judgement that extended to its citizens as well. Morgan's clientele consisted of Chicago's gilded age social elite: most used what they learned from Morgan to improve socially and culturally. But Morgan was not just running a charm school- she taught "culture" and wanted to develop "thinkers."<sup>164</sup>

According to a catalogue for 1915, a student would be required to gain an extensive knowledge of poetry and prose, of authors, and of classical and modern plays and playwrights. There were special courses for professional teachers, dramatic artists, and operatic career singers. Students showing talent were now encouraged to write dialogues, sketches, and plays, which, when worthy, would be presented at recitals.<sup>165</sup>

In this way, Morgan made theater acceptable and understandable to Chicago's upper classes and helped shaped their taste towards the new drama. In doing so, she also made it acceptable for "society girls" to go on the stage, as long as it was art. Playwright Alice Gerstenberg and Ellen Van Volkenburg, co-founder of the Chicago Little Theatre, both studied with Morgan as young women, and would become important figures in the Chicago art theatre scene.<sup>166</sup>

---

<sup>164</sup> Sozen 38.

<sup>165</sup> Sozen 49-50.

<sup>166</sup> Campbell, Hugh Stuart. "News of the Society World." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Nov 8, 1908: F6. ProQuest. Web. 18 May 2018; "Give College Girl's Plays: Bryn Mawr Graduates Present Miss..." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Mar 13, 1908: 3. ProQuest Web. 18 May 2018.

Morgan's studio featured a small platform stage, Sozen states that it is fifteen-and-a-half feet deep, with a sixteen-foot-wide proscenium, and a height of eighteen-and-a-half feet.<sup>167</sup> In photos, the stage appears to be raised about two feet from the rest of the room, with two steps leading down into the main room.<sup>168</sup> The back wall had windows and a fire place, which were probably covered by a drop curtain during performances, and a traverse curtain across the proscenium. Stage lighting was accomplished with "room lamps and standing goose-necked student lamps which could be turned in any direction."<sup>169</sup> The main room was estimated to seat 125 on folding chairs.<sup>170</sup> The space was used primarily for instruction; it was usually referred to as a lecture hall or studio, not a theatre. However, Morgan used the space to stage regular student recitals and performances on this small stage. The design of her stage becomes significant in that Van Volkenburg and partner Maurice Browne seem to have borrowed the idea for their Chicago Little Theatre stage, which opened on the fourth floor of the Fine Arts Building in 1912. Although theirs was designed and used *only* as a theatre, the dimensions and proportions are nearly identical – as is the idea of converting a space into a theatre.

Morgan had hoped to be the person to bring the "new drama" to Chicago. In June 1895, she sent to Barrett Eastman (the critic who had disliked *The Master Builder*) the text of an address she had recently given on the state of the theatre. In this, she called for:

---

<sup>167</sup> Sozen 36.

<sup>168</sup> Swan n. pag.

<sup>169</sup> Sozen 36.

<sup>170</sup> Sozen 33.

A Home Theater, where nothing but plays distinctly literary in tone should be produced by people of character and social standing. A theater in which the atmosphere shall be educating, high-toned, and elevating. For years it never occurred to me that it was my function to bring such an institution into existence, and I am not at all certain of it now. I only know that my intuition, that “inner voice,” pleads for a characteristic dramatic expression of high thoughts and ideals, and as one of the results of this pleading I was led to produce “The Master Builder” during the last season.

She proposes that in order to change the theatre, it is necessary to change the public tastes. “I feel certain that the only way to insure success in the way of the production of high class plays is to enlist the interest of the non-theater-going public and so create a demand for them,” and suggests the creation of a theatre free from commercial concerns, “which should apparently be designed for the art-loving minority.” Eastman uses the rest of the column to mock her attempt at theatrical reform, saying, “There is no widespread demand in this neck of the woods for a theater toned higher than A flat.”<sup>171</sup>

Morgan abandoned her attempts to produce the new drama as the work of opening her own studio took precedence in the late 1890s. She expresses some regrets about this in her autobiography, admitting that she had early on envisioned opening a theatre in a vacant building she passed downtown “. . .for the production of the plays of Shakespeare in a modern and artistic manner,” but was not ambitious enough to act on her idea at the time:

---

<sup>171</sup> E. B. “The Drama and its Devotees.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Jun 23, 1895: 36. *ProQuest*. Web. 18 May 2018.

At that time my presentation of the plays of Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Yeats and other dramatists had made a distinct impression and I imagined that some of my admirers would come forward and offer the money with which to provide an artistic playhouse. Time went on and the money did not come – and I did not ask for it. When I went into the Fine Arts Building I determined to abandon the giving of plays altogether and confine my efforts to educational and cultural work, the development of the speaking voice, interpretive readings, and the study of literature. My reasons were that I was not properly equipped to give plays on an adequate scale, and the worry and bother of trying to give them without adequate means was discouraging. Another reason was, the constant presentation of plays gave the public the impression that I was conducting a preparatory school for the professional stage.<sup>172</sup>

Given Morgan's evident ambition and forceful personality, it is disappointing to see that she was held back not just by the societal norms and expectations for women of her time, but also by self-doubt. In hindsight, Morgan seems to have found a better way to achieve her ends: when she could not get the general public or the critical press to support the new drama on its own terms, she worked to create a new public. Her efforts through the Anna Morgan studio can be read as a long-term project of creating an audience for art theatre. Additionally, Morgan encouraged her students to not just perform but also create, and it is she who inspired two of the most important figures of the art theatre movement – Van Volkenburg and Gerstenberg.

---

<sup>172</sup> Morgan 67-8.

Morgan writes fondly of the social life of the Fine Arts Building; this party continued with the founding of the Chicago Little Theatre in 1912. Browne and Van Volkenburg's Little Theatre continued to coalesce a community: besides producing plays, their theatre also hosted a speaker's series and the Little Theatre lobby featured a tearoom, open daily 4:00 to 6:00, that continued the salon-like tradition Morgan noted of the early days of the building, which became a place for Chicago's aesthetes to meet. The Little Theatre came to be the theatrical expression of Chicago's Literary Renaissance, simply by giving people of like-mind a place to gather. In *The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters*, Bernard Duffey states:

More than any other part of the Chicago renaissance, the theatre was to move in direct continuity from the earlier generation to the later. Not only was the Fine Arts Building a center of dramatic effort in both groups, but among the actual plays produced, Shaw, Maeterlinck, and Greek tragedy made up a common staple . . . As Anna Morgan had created a personal center for the earlier productions, so did Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre for the later. . . Both found their labors made possible by the patronage of the Chicago gentry, and there was some carryover of personnel from the earlier group to the later. . . for neither one did the concept of the amateur theatre as an expressive community hold a chief place . . . They were uplifters, raising the taste of their audience to a preconceived level of perfection rather than spokesman

expressing something to be presumed to be common and indigenous to the intellectual life of their time and place.<sup>173</sup>

Although Morgan failed to ignite the theatrical revolution she had hoped to in 1885, she still achieved her ends. She recognized as much in her memoir: “Consequently, and in this place, I am going to take credit to myself for having originated and carried forward to this hour with unimpaired success the ‘Little Theatre’ idea.”<sup>174</sup> She goes on to praise the work of her former student Van Volkenburg’s Chicago Little Theatre, and the Aldis family theatre in Lake Forest as representing the best of the new movement.<sup>175</sup>

Morgan and the Fine Arts Building were successful at creating community – an art world – that joined Chicago’s artistic bohemia and the smart set in a shared interest in the new theatre. This element of community remains a distinguishing characteristic of the habitus of today’s Off-Loop theatre scene. Morgan inspired two of the leading figures of the art theatre/little theatre movement in Chicago: Ellen Van Volkenburg and Alice Gerstenberg. Additionally, Morgan’s staging practices – the small proscenium stage in her studio – inspired the Chicago Little Theatre, the first group to create a theatre out of a found space; the idea of theatre in a small, converted space is also an element of the habitus. Finally, Morgan is important because she pioneered the new theatre in Chicago. When it was not successful, she

---

<sup>173</sup> Duffey, Bernard. *The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters*. E. Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1954. Print. 239 – 41.

<sup>174</sup> Morgan 69.

<sup>175</sup> Morgan 70. Writing in 1918, Morgan could not have foreseen the influence another of her pupils, Alice Gerstenberg, would come to have on theatre in Chicago.



tried something else – building an audience. This can also be viewed as a disposition of the Off-Loop theatre habitus: the ability to fail and try again.

### Endowed Theatre in Chicago

Hull-House's production of Jonson's *The Sad Shepherd* in 1904 furthered the alternative theatre movement and had far greater ramifications than Pelham and Addams could have foreseen. Donald Robertson was in the audience for the May 11 performance. Robertson, an established, New York-based touring actor in the commercial theatre, had recently played in Ibsen's *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler* with the Mary Shaw Co. at the Garrick Theatre and Steinway Hall in March and April of 1904.<sup>176</sup> Seeing the performance at Hull-House was noteworthy enough that he wrote to his wife:

Last night as I told you I would I went to Hull House and saw the rare spectacle of Ben Johnson's (sic) play – program enclosed. The acting was ludicrous but the event was noteworthy – saw there Mr. and Mrs. Bennett the critic came right over to me and was very cordial. Mrs. Jane Addams was really tender in her welcome and a host of ladies I had met that night we played *Ghosts* were all as good to me as they could be.<sup>177</sup>

Robertson was born in Scotland in 1860, immigrated to the United States with his family at age thirteen and made his stage debut in 1879.<sup>178</sup> He had worked as a supporting actor in

---

<sup>176</sup> Dryden 116.

<sup>177</sup> James O'Donnell Bennett was the theatre critic for the *Chicago Record-Herald*. The Mary Shaw company had performed at Hull-House in 1904. Robertson, Donald. "Letter to Anna Titus Robertson, May 11, 1904." *Donald Robertson Papers (1825 – 1947)*. Chicago History Museum Research Center, Chicago, IL.

<sup>178</sup> "Robertson, Noted Stage Veteran, Dies." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 21, 1926: 1. ProQuest. Web. 16 May 2018.

melodramas and a “character” leading man; in 1887, he went to England, and worked in London for several years.<sup>179</sup> He returned to the US in the early 1890s. He was also a writer and poet: by 1896, Robertson was touring with his own adaptation of *The Man in the Iron Mask*, playing the dual lead roles. He became interested in the new drama coming out of Europe – Ibsen, and Shaw, as well as what he tended to refer to as the “poetic” drama. In 1904, he decided to make his stand in Chicago and start his own company. As evidenced by his letters to his wife, this decision was perhaps reinforced by his acquaintance with Addams and Hull-  
House’s theatre, and his attendance at *The Sad Shepard* merely confirmed an already-made plan.

Robertson began giving private acting lessons to the daughters of Chicago’s social elite. He soon began offering acting classes at Steinway Hall, as well as directing plays and productions for various women’s clubs and charity events.<sup>180</sup> The charity work and his dealings with “society” may have led him into contact with the Chicago Woman’s Club, and this may have sparked the second phase of the development of art theatre in Chicago: the drive to create an “endowed” theatre. In September of 1905, the Chicago Woman’s Club discussed and endorsed a plan to establish a “permanent subscription theatre for presenting the best plays.”<sup>181</sup> On October 29, the *Chicago Tribune* announced that the 700-member club would establish “a theatre in which only classic plays will be presented.”<sup>182</sup> It is unclear if Robertson

---

<sup>179</sup> "Amusement Notes." *New York Times* (1857-1922) Jul 19 1887: 4. ProQuest. Web. 16 May 2018.

<sup>180</sup> "Plays & Players." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) May 22 1904: 21. ProQuest. Web. 16 May 2018. "Display Ad 4 -- no Title." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Dec 20 1904: 5. ProQuest. Web. 16 May 2018. "Members of Woman's Aid Club Who Will Give Play Today." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Dec 16 1905: 3. ProQuest. Web. 16 May 2018.

<sup>181</sup> Chicago Woman's Club. *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club for the First Forty Years of Its Organization, 1876-1916*. Chicago: Chicago Woman's Club, 1916. 239.

<sup>182</sup> "News of the Woman's Clubs." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Oct 29 1905: 1. ProQuest. Web. 7 Dec. 2013.

influenced the members of the Woman's Club to undertake the project, or if the idea originated among club members and Robertson was simply the beneficiary of their plan.<sup>183</sup> Regardless, Robertson was named as the director of a new theatre company– to be called the Players Theatre – backed by a group of the most wealthy and socially prominent women in the city.

In March 1906, the Woman's Club announced that they had approved a plan to create a stock theatre company which would produce for forty weeks each season. Mrs. Isabel C. Buckingham, reporting for the committee, said "the theatre is not for the exploitation of so-called stars, but is to be devoted to the building up of a company of artists who can interpret intelligently the works of the masters, old and new."<sup>184</sup> The theatre's mission was: "to the educational influences of the dramatic art, the promotion and welfare of players, and the maintenance of high standards in the profession." It was to be a subscription-based theatre, a novel idea at the time. Mrs. George Benedict Carpenter is quoted as saying, "This is but the crystallization of a movement that is in the air, not only here but all over the country."<sup>185</sup>

The terms "art," "independent," "endowed," "subscription," "European-style" and "national" are all used somewhat interchangeably in this period, but all terms point towards the same general idea – of a theatre free from the taint of commercialism. "Uplift" was a popular term at the time: "With the new theatre established it is the hope of the club women that the dramatic taste of the public will be uplifted and that the objectionable play gradually

---

<sup>183</sup> Pierce, L. France. "Chicago to Have Two Subsidized Playhouses." *The Theatre Magazine*, July 1906: 194-5. Print. 194. In a 1906 article, club member Mrs. George B. Carpenter is given credit for originating the idea three years earlier, which would place it prior to Robertson's arrival in Chicago.

<sup>184</sup> "Women to Own Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Mar 01 1906: 6. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018.

<sup>185</sup> "News of the Woman's Clubs: Club Calendar for the Week." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Oct 29 1905: 6. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018.

will disappear from the stage in America.”<sup>186</sup> While Hull-House’s theatre program had evolved into an art theatre, Hull-House itself was a charity organization: something for the social elite to support, but not necessarily *attend*. Chicago’s leading citizens wanted an art theatre to call their own.

J. Dennis Rich and Kevin L. Seligman tie the drive to establish an art theatre in Chicago to the movement to establish a national theatre. In their article “The New Theatre of Chicago, 1906-1907,” they cite “Financing a National Theatre” by James S. Metcalfe, which appeared in *North American Review* in February 1905. Metcalfe sets forth objectives and an organizational proposal for the establishment of an endowed national theatre:

An endowed national theatre would set the highest possible standard by freeing the drama from motivations “based chiefly on money-getting.” It would operate free from the limitations of the star system and “claim its superiority on the excellence of the ensemble work,” yet it would win the allegiance of true artists and actors because of its “permanency, its higher ideals, its standards of fair dealing and its rewards based only on artistic accomplishment.” Such a theatre was to be a symbol of national culture. “If we leave this (the theatre’s) tremendous influence in the hands of the ignorant and the uncultured, we are neglecting a most potent instrument. . . .”<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>186</sup> “News of the Woman’s Clubs: Club Calendar for the Week.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872 – 1922), Oct 29 1905:6. ProQuest. Web. 16 May 2018.

<sup>187</sup> Rich, J. Dennis, and Kevin L. Seligman. “The New Theatre of Chicago, 1906-1907.” *Educational Theatre Journal*, 26.1 (1974): 53–68. Print. 54.

The Woman's Club goals tended towards public education, social reform, and "uplift"; i.e. "With the new theatre established it is the hope of the club women that the dramatic taste of the public will be uplifted and that the objectionable play gradually will disappear from the stage in America."<sup>188</sup> Although the rhetoric of a "national theatre" does not enter into the discussion surrounding the Chicago Woman's Club efforts, it plays heavily into the competing effort which would derail it: the New Theatre of Chicago.

Metcalf's exhortation for a national theatre resonated locally: on November 6, 1905, the *Tribune* announced that ground had been broken for what would come to be known as the New Theatre in New York City. Headlined "\$3,000,000 For Nation's Theater," the article details the construction costs and funding campaign for an endowed, subscription-based theatre in New York City, modeled on the Comédie-Française.<sup>189</sup> Declaring it will be "America's National Theatre, long dreamed of, in this city," the article includes few details about the type of company and work to be presented, and instead focuses on the costs involved in constructing the opulent theater and the names of the wealthy men underwriting the enterprise.<sup>190</sup> This seems to have provided the impetus for a group of Chicago's prominent businessmen to start their own theatre, in an attempt to beat New York City to the distinction of having a "New Theater." Within two weeks, the *Tribune* reported that Chicago would be the sight of a national theater, "...where, unrestricted by the demands of box office or syndicate, the world's best dramas may be presented. Less than a year will see its realization. The plays of Ibsen, Hermann

---

<sup>188</sup> "News of the Woman's Clubs: Club Calendar for the Week." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Oct 29 1905: 6. ProQuest. Web. 16 May 2018

<sup>189</sup> The New Theatre of New York opened in 1909 and lasted two seasons.

<sup>190</sup> "\$3,000,000 For Nation's Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Nov 09 1905: 5. ProQuest. Web. 16 May 2018.

Sudermann, and George Bernard Shaw are among those which, it is said, will be produced.”

Readers were reassured that “... the promoters of the venture feel that they not only have stolen a march upon New York, where a similar scheme is under way, but will be free to model theirs upon genuinely artistic lines, which will make Gothams’ by comparison resemble a bourgeois parade.”<sup>191</sup>

Chicago’s New Theatre originated among a group of prominent Chicago men: real estate developer Arthur Aldis, Arthur Bissell of the Bissell-Weisart Piano Co., Robert Herrick, novelist and faculty member at University of Chicago, and writer Hobart Chatfield-Taylor.<sup>192</sup> In late December 1905, a letter to potential subscribers promised a theatre that would produce fifteen plays in thirty weeks, that would do plays of “distinct merit” with a “worthy company and intelligent stage management.”<sup>193</sup> By May of 1906, the venture had raised \$30,000 in a “guarantee fund” from socially prominent Chicagoans and sold \$25,000 in season tickets.<sup>194</sup> With \$55,000 raised, they took out a lease on Steinway Hall and committed to renovations that were expected to cost \$50,000.<sup>195</sup>

The New Theater of Chicago holds the distinction of being the first endowed art theatre in the United States.<sup>196</sup> In “An Historical Study of the New Theatre and the Robertson Players

---

<sup>191</sup> “Model Theater in Chicago.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Nov 26 1905: 1. ProQuest. Web. 16 May 2018.

<sup>192</sup> Privatt, Kathy L. “The New Theater of Chicago: Democracy 1; Aristocracy 0.” *Theatre History Studies* 24. (2004): 97-108. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 17 Jan. 2017. Pg. 105.

<sup>193</sup> Highlander MA thesis, 2.

<sup>194</sup> This is their endowment fund. The New Theatre was faulted for being commercially driven, but also tended to exacerbate this perception by using business terminology; i.e. referring to it as an “enterprise,” and their board members as “trustees.”

<sup>195</sup> Highlander, 3.

<sup>196</sup> Privatt, 105. Privatt acknowledges a theatre in Red Wing, MN was established by a bequest from a citizen who left money and land to build a theatre for the town in 1905. Technically, this was the first endowed theatre, but it operated as a “road house” and not a producing theatre.

Of Chicago (1906-08),” James Highlander characterizes the civic chauvinism underlying the effort as part of its initial appeal, saying that at this time, “Chicago was undergoing its own private ‘Renaissance.’ It was revolting against the superiority of the East, particularly New York, in matters of culture and the arts. It was eager to advance anything that would aid in establishing Chicago as a power in these matters.”<sup>197</sup> The New Theatre of Chicago’s *raison d’être* was to beat New York City to the punch, but it had little mission beyond that goal. The men most deeply involved in the organization – Aldis, Bissell, Chatfield-Taylor – cared deeply about the theatre and had the best of intentions; but their lack of experience, the hasty inception and lack of a unified vision or mission for the project proved to be its undoing

The New Theatre infringed upon the Chicago Woman’s Club’s effort: the Woman’s Club members tried to find common ground with the men behind the New Theatre, to no avail.<sup>198</sup> On May 13, the Woman’s Club issued a statement charging that the New Theatre was a commercial enterprise, while their efforts were dedicated to the betterment of the city, the players, and the drama itself.<sup>199</sup> The Women’s Club and the New Theatre trustees would continue to spar in the daily papers through the spring and into the summer of 1906. In July, they received national attention when *The Theatre* announced, “Chicago to Have Two Subsidized Playhouses,” and contrasted the women’s efforts with those of the men: the Woman’s Club had 250 subscribers and a \$50,000 endowment, the men had a \$30,000 “guarantee fund” and claimed to have sold \$30,000 in season tickets. The men would spend

---

<sup>197</sup> Highlander MA thesis, 37.

<sup>198</sup> “News of the Theaters.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* May 04 1906: 8. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.

<sup>199</sup> Hubbard, W. L. “Crowds Hear Mansfield and Argue on His Merits.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* May 13 1906: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.

\$50,000 to remodel Steinway Hall while the women would use Music Hall in the Fine Arts Building, the management having agreed to make \$30,000 in alterations for them. The women had put Donald Robertson in charge, and the men had hired Victor Mapes from New York to manage their company. Author L. France Pierce observed “Each is determined to outdo the other; both enterprises seem firmly on their feet, and Chicago has become the seat of the first practical step for the founding of an art theatre in the New World.”<sup>200</sup> At some point during the summer of 1906, the Woman’s Club surrendered. That announcement proved to be premature: at some point during the summer of 1906, the Woman’s Club surrendered.<sup>201</sup> The New Theatre moved forward, the Woman’s Club never revisited their attempts at dramatic uplift, and Donald Robertson continued his efforts to establish a theatre on his own.<sup>202</sup>

The effort to establish an endowed or subscription theatre is important to the dispositions that created the habitus of Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre. Despite the fact that art theatre in Chicago really began at Hull-House, an institution that served those at the bottom of the social strata, Chicago’s social elite co-opted the movement. The race to create an endowed theatre, essentially pitting a group of wealthy men against a group of socially prominent women, marks a rare instance in Chicago theatre history where the spirit of collegiality was clearly *not* present. Its absence seems to have taught a collective lesson, which impacts the habitus. Like the other arts, theatre depends on the philanthropic class – the effort to establish an endowed theatre company was seen as akin to establishing a public library or an

---

<sup>200</sup> Pierce, L. France. “Chicago to Have Two Subsidized Playhouses.” *The Theatre Magazine*, July 1906: 194-5. Print. 194.

<sup>201</sup> Mantle, Burns. “Second Nibbles at Drama Still Is Chicago’s Fate.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Dec 29 1907: A1. *ProQuest*. Web. 7 Dec. 2013.

<sup>202</sup> Highlander MA thesis, 42.



art museum. That the founders of the New Theatre also attempted to manage the enterprise doomed it to failure. At the same time, the early art theatre/little theatre movement in Chicago would come to engage the socially prominent not only as funders, but as practitioners. While the debacle of the New Theatre would teach a generation of the city's theatre-loving elite that theatre as a business is best left to the professionals, it did not stop them from participating in it. By their participation in later efforts – such as at Anna Morgan's studio, at the Chicago Little Theatre, and at the Aldis family estate – a spirit of collegiality was strengthened. The history of the art theatre/little theatre movement in Chicago can be viewed as an effort to combine the sense of purpose and mission that drove Hull-House's work as well as that of the Chicago Little Theatre with the kind of professionalism that characterized Donald Robertson's efforts, within a sustainable and practical framework of funding and support. In this era, the idea of non-commercial theatre was being negotiated, and this becomes an important element of Chicago's Off-Loop habitus.

## **The New Theatre**

The New Theatre of Chicago holds the distinction of being the first endowed art theatre in the United States, but is memorable for little else.<sup>203</sup> The concept of non-commercial "art" theatre was still being negotiated in this era: the failure of the New Theatre represents a learning moment for Chicago's philanthropic class and also speaks to the habitus of Off-Loop theatre.<sup>204</sup> In short, failure *is* acceptable, with the caveat that you get up and try again. Kathy

---

<sup>203</sup> Privatt, 105.

<sup>204</sup> The terms "art theatre" and "little theatre" are somewhat interchangeable, but both denote non-commercial theatre. "Little theatre" came into vogue following the establishment of the Chicago Little Theatre in 1912. "Art theatre" at this date (1908) meant non-commercial theatre but was generally conceived of as being on a similar production scale as commercial theatre; Donald Robertson's efforts, covered later in this chapter, are more in the

L. Privatt characterizes the New Theatre as “Formed by a cohesive, elite group, the New Theater’s mission was riddled with conflict between business and artistic goals from the outset.”<sup>205</sup> Aldis, Bissell, and Chatfield-Taylor would continue their involvement in subsequent art theatre ventures – the failure of the New Theatre did not discourage them.

Victor Mapes was hired as artistic director and Steinway Hall was leased and renovated. Mapes had graduated from Columbia and studied drama at the Sorbonne. He had worked as a drama critic, playwright, and stage manager in New York and Boston. Privatt writes that “Mapes additional appeal was not artistic background, but an ‘ancient family’ of New York, putting him on equal footing with his elite employers.”<sup>206</sup> He was apparently more accomplished at navigating the world of society than the theatre, as soon became evident to the men who had hired him:

. . . a gentleman of remarkable knowledge and technical equipment, who nevertheless failed in comprehension of the immediate problem provided for his solution. He offered the best of reasons for the things he did, but they often proved to be the wrong things in spite of their intellectual defence (sic).<sup>207</sup>

He was given full artistic control but had to contend with the unwanted input of the numerous “trustees” and subscribers – men such as the wealthy and socially prominent Aldis, Bissell, and Chatfield-Taylor. Mapes eventually selected five programs of plays from a list of over two

---

“art theatre” vein; the Chicago Little Theatre, the Players Workshop, and the Lake Forest Players are more congruent with the “little theatre” description, in that they staged art theatre on a much more intimate scale.

<sup>205</sup> Privatt, 97.

<sup>206</sup> Privatt, 101

<sup>207</sup> “A Theatrical Autopsy.” *The Dial* (1880-1929) Mar. 1, 1907: 129 - 131. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 Jan 2017. 130.

hundred generated by subscribers, but what he chose pleased no one.<sup>208</sup> Rich and Seligman note that Mapes' commercial sensibilities were fundamentally at odds with his position as artistic director of an art theatre, as he "... measured aesthetic success by the amount of box office income."<sup>209</sup> The season he eventually selected conformed to the guidelines he was given by trustees, but otherwise lacked any sense of aesthetic judgment. Mapes proved to be one of the New Theatre's biggest liabilities: he was tactless, temperamental, and did not share the trustee's vision for the theatre. To the trustee's undoubted relief, he resigned in January 1906, after just five months on the job.

Artistic leadership aside, the New Theatre was in financial trouble before it started: the trustees had leased 800-seat Steinway Hall, which required extensive renovations. In addition to such alterations as demolishing several floors above the stage to create a fly gallery, the audience areas were opulently redecorated to resemble a Parisian boulevard theatre, including a new gallery, smoking lounge and a tea room in the lobby. The renovations ran over budget, consuming most of the intended operating budget and eating into the theatre's endowment. Rich and Seligman point out that the trustees of the theatre should have attempted to raise money to replenish the fund immediately, prior to opening night, but this did not happen.

October 8, 1906, was opening night for the New Theater with a triple bill: *Sainara* by Ernest d'Hervelly, W.S. Gilbert's *Engaged*, and George Ade's *Marse Covington*.<sup>210</sup> One of the trustees later wrote:

---

<sup>208</sup> Highlander, James L. "America's First Art Theatre: The New Theatre of Chicago." *Educational Theatre Journal* 11. (1959): 285-290. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 17 Jan. 2017. Pag. 286.

<sup>209</sup> Rich and Seligman, 66.

<sup>210</sup> Highlander MA thesis, 8.

As for the opening bill, its character was such as to leave fairly aghast all serious sympathizers with the undertaking. Instead of selecting some strong and vital play of the sort for which the institution was supposed to exist, the director had patched up a programme by taking Gilbert's "Engaged," mutilating it almost beyond recognition, and associating with it two small pieces, one an insignificant trifle from the French, the other a character-sketch by a popular humorist of the day. The defense urged for this extraordinary hodge-podge was that it enabled every member of the company to have a part in the opening performance. We spoke a little while ago of the director's gift of finding excellent reasons for doing the wrong thing; this is a typical illustration of what we meant. Never did a mountain's labor bring forth a more ridiculous mouse. From that moment the fate of the enterprise was sealed.<sup>211</sup>

The evening was a great social event, however, as Chicago's elite filled the theatre.

Unfortunately, many left early. Reviews were mixed, and attendance for the New Theater fell off rapidly.

Within a month of its opening, the theatre was in crisis. The wealthy subscribers quickly abandoned the theatre, the plays selected did not appeal to a general audience, the shows received poor reviews, and the general public perceived the theatre as a private club.

Highlander cites an editorial in the *Record-Herald* that ran in early November which states that the New Theatre was in dire straits, failing to either interest its audience or please critics.<sup>212</sup>

---

<sup>211</sup> "A Theatrical Autopsy," 130.

<sup>212</sup> Highlander MA thesis, 19.

The next day, the *Tribune* printed a letter from Arthur Aldis that attempted to allay the public confusion that although the New Theatre was subscription-based, it was not a members-only affair. He ends by stating that ticket prices had been reduced.<sup>213</sup> The following day, it was announced that actress Chrystal Herne had joined the company. Herne was the daughter of groundbreaking American realist playwright James A. Herne; she was not quite a star in her own right, but familiar to Chicago audiences from previous seasons.<sup>214</sup> Miss Herne was accompanied to Chicago by her mother, actress and director Katherine Corcoran Herne, who would ultimately replace Mapes as director of the New Theatre.

The New Theater continued to do badly in terms of reviews and box office receipts. Highlander estimates, based on ticket prices and reported revenues that by December, “the average attendance, exclusive of subscribers, at the sixteen matinee and evening performances would have been slightly over twenty-three persons a performance.”<sup>215</sup> This would have been the play *Elga*, starring Chrystal Herne. The following play, Arthur Wing Pinero’s *Sweet Lavender*, was a compromise selection between Mapes and the trustees. Only one critic reviewed it, W.L. Hubbard of the *Tribune*. He criticized it as an “old” play that Chicago audiences had seen better produced twenty-years earlier and questioned the viability of the New Theater itself.<sup>216</sup> Katherine Corcoran Herne directed Sardou’s *Diplomacy*, which opened on December 31, 1906. She received credit in the press for making the play successful. Mapes resigned his position the following day, and Herne was given his job. Immediately, critics claimed to notice an

---

<sup>213</sup> Highlander MA thesis, 19.

<sup>214</sup> James A. Herne was the author of *Margaret Fleming* and *Shore Acres*. He died in 1901.

<sup>215</sup> Highlander MA thesis, 22.

<sup>216</sup> Highlander MA thesis, 24.

improvement in the work, but it was too little, too late: on January 19, 1907, Aldis issued a statement that the New Theater would be closing due to financial losses. The final two productions played out their engagements, and the New Theatre came to a merciful end after just twenty weeks.<sup>217</sup>

The New Theatre was a significant moment in Chicago's theatre history, but many of its lessons were negative. Highlander analyzes the failure of the New Theater in his thesis: at base lies the differing and unclear objectives of the trustees and the management of the theatre. He also finds that the trustees overestimated the public's interest in an art theatre, and - by virtue of their support for it and their social position – created the impression in the public mind that it was a members-only, society affair, which consequently limited their audiences even further. Weak play choices and weak productions alienated subscribers.<sup>218</sup> Although the New Theater seems like a disruption in the development of art theater in Chicago, it is important to remember that it also introduced and established the idea of a subscription-based, non-profit theatre to the city, something that has become part of the dispositions of Off-Loop theatre. Donald Robertson and the Little Theatre would utilize this structure, as would most subsequent alternative theatres in Chicago.

The New Theatre failure also furthered the idea of ensemble theatre, and of theatre as an art rather than strictly as entertainment.<sup>219</sup> It galvanized the support of the social elite of

---

<sup>217</sup> Highlander MA thesis, 26 - 30.

<sup>218</sup> Highlander MA thesis, 37 - 38.

<sup>219</sup> The New Theatre featured an ensemble of professional but relatively unknown actors, engaged for the season. In this respect, it operated much like the stock companies of its time, except the intention was to get away from the idea of "stars" in their casting practices. Chrystal Herne's engagement was uncharacteristic of the New Theatre's practices.

the city towards theatre – they had supported the Art Institute, libraries, the Symphony, universities. The New Theatre effort served to elevate theatre to the high arts, and made it acceptable for the wealthy to support it. It also taught - again, negatively - that for Chicago theatre to survive, it needed to speak to the Chicago audience: the New Theatre did not. Rich and Seligman speculate that New Theatre may have overcome its financial difficulties had it enjoyed popular support, but this was not forthcoming – its public image as a toy theatre for the city's millionaire's persisted, and proved to be its undoing.

On the positive side, the New Theater served as something of a training ground for trustees Arthur Aldis, Arthur Bissell, and Hobart Chatfield-Taylor; they would continue to involve themselves in dramatic uplift throughout the 1910s. In March 1907, *The Dial* published "A Theatrical Autopsy." Most likely written by Arthur Aldis, it is an honest and critical evaluation of the New Theater effort. The author states that the men behind the enterprise had their hearts in the right place, but admits:

All the way from start to finish, there were such evidence of mismanagement, such an obvious lack of intelligent direction, that failure was almost a foregone conclusion with the impartial outside observer. It is best not to mince matters in dealing with this subject, because the experiment which has now failed is going to be tried over again – perhaps many times, - and is eventually going to prove successful.<sup>220</sup>

---

<sup>220</sup> "A Theatrical Autopsy," 129.

The New Theatre's greatest contribution towards the dispositions of Off-Loop theatre lie in its failure, which served as a challenge to others – to make this idea of non-commercial theatre work. As Aldis suggested, others *did* try again: Donald Robertson, the Chicago Little Theatre, Alice Gerstenberg and many others had varying levels of success, but in their efforts refined and developed the idea further. The idea of non-commercial (art) theatre practiced on an economically small scale (little) became part of the habitus of Chicago theatre: although the city tends to think big in many other respects, the New Theatre seemed to teach the lesson that in terms of theatre, small is better.

### **Donald Robertson**

Donald Robertson was a moderately successful actor in the touring commercial theatre of the early 1900s. Born in Scotland, raised in and based out of New York City, he found Chicago to be the place to fulfill his dream of creating a theatre based on the model provided by the independent theatre movement in Europe. In 1915, during an address to a civic club, he reflected on his work in Chicago:

When I came here, I expected to spend two weeks playing an engagement, that was ten years ago, but except on business or a holiday, I have not left town since, because I discovered quickly that Chicago was a city of dreams, that had in them the urge of fulfillment; not only were they vague dreams by night but they were living pillars of cloud by day, it did not take me long to discover that, and so I said to myself here at last is the place where we will have a civic theater, a place where your youngsters can go and enjoy the work of the greatest minds



that have ever raised their offerings up to the gaze of God. The works of Aeschylus (sic), Sophocles, Euripides, Plautus, Terrence, Molière that set the world asmilng and Shakespeare who showed it not only the beauty of Holiness but the holiness of Beauty.<sup>221</sup>

Robertson stayed in Chicago for the express purpose of founding a theatre company; letters in his archive indicate that he turned down other work in order to pursue this idea. In a letter to his wife from May 1904, he rather sheepishly admits that he was offered a position in a neighborhood stock company for the next season, but rejected it in favor of starting his own company. “I simply will have my own co. out by that – I will.”<sup>222</sup>

Robertson is the least known, but perhaps the most responsible for Chicago’s art theatre scene in the early twentieth century. Dickinson called him “one of the most dynamic figures in the modern movement of the stage.”<sup>223</sup> Prior to World War I, he made three attempts at establishing his ideal theatre: the Donald Robertson Players, which performed at Ravinia, the Garrick Theatre, and the Fine Arts Building during the 1907 – 08 season; the Robertson Players at the Art Institute, which lasted for two seasons, 1908-09 and 1909-10; and the Chicago Theatre Society’s Drama Players, for the 1911-1912 season. He considered himself a dramatic reformer, with a specific vision of what constituted “intellectual” drama and saw Chicago as the ideal place to enact his vision: “We are cultivating the highest ideals here in the

---

<sup>221</sup> Robertson, Donald. *The Player's Calling In Relation To Municipal Theatres*. Chicago: Manufacturers' And Dealers' Association Of America, 1915.

<sup>222</sup> Robertson, Donald. “Letter to Anna Titus Robertson, May 27, 1904.” *Donald Robertson Papers (1825 – 1947)*. Chicago History Museum Research Center, Chicago, IL. Robertson’s use of Chicago’s motto “I will” may have been unintentional, but seems fitting in retrospect.

<sup>223</sup> Dickinson 30.

American West, where the soil as yet has no traditions. We are inculcating in the young mind a love of dramatic ideals to cling through all the life.”<sup>224</sup>

Although his terminology shifted over the years in discussing his project - moving from terms like “endowed” and “art theatre” in the early days to “civic” and “municipal theatre” in the 1920s - at base, Robertson consistently sought to create an endowed professional theatre ensemble which would perform “literary” and “intellectual” drama in repertory. For him, this meant primarily classical and contemporary drama from Europe: works by Molière, Gogol, Hauptmann, Sudermann, Echegaray, Ibsen, Giacosa, Calderon, Goldoni, and Maeterlinck, among others. Robertson thought of his theatre in popular terms; as one that reached a general audience. Newlin states that “Robertson believed that audiences remained bound to the commercial theatre because they were not aware of the variety of drama available . . .”<sup>225</sup> In 1913, Robertson noted:

I never talk nor think of uplifting the stage. I hold that any one following its noblest manifestations is uplifted thereby. My aim is to present the best plays I can find, the work of dramatists rather than playwrights, whether the plays were turned out two hundred years ago or to-day. ( . . ) It is my effort always to find the poetic in the actual, the universal in the particular and the Ideal in the real.

---

<sup>224</sup> Pierce, L. France. “An Art Theatre in Successful Operation.” *The Theatre Magazine* Aug. 1908: 215-17. Print. 215.

<sup>225</sup> Newlin, Keith. “Uplifting the Stage: Hamlin Garland and the Chicago Theater Society.” *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 8.1 (1996): 1. ProQuest. Web. 17 May 2018. 3.

Great works of art have all been this broad, and great works of art have always been “entertaining.”<sup>226</sup>

Robertson had been named the artistic director of the endowed theatre proposal supported by the Chicago Woman’s Club in 1905. The failure of the New Theatre evidently cooled the clubwomen’s interest in an endowed theatre, but Robertson decided to move ahead with his own plans for a repertory company without any significant financial support. Being an experienced touring actor, he certainly recognized the need for institutional support, but his passion for the work itself seems to have outweighed financial considerations at the time.

Robertson had no significant connections – professional or otherwise, when he arrived in Chicago. His early years in the city are hazy; it is known that he arrived in 1904, and the Chicago Woman’s Club debacle occurred in 1905 and 1906. At some point during this time, he began to teach acting classes at the Cosmopolitan School of Musical and Dramatic Arts. In August of 1907, Robertson announced plans to present a season of plays in repertory at Ravinia, a suburban amusement park, using an acting company composed of himself, his wife Anna, and his advanced students.<sup>227</sup> As the Donald Robertson Company, they presented twelve plays in repertory during September and October, among them Molière’s *The Miser*, Strindberg’s *The Father*, Maeterlinck’s *The Intruder*, Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm*, as well as plays by Robert Browning, Gerhart Hauptmann, and José Echegaray. Jan Charles Czechowski, in his dissertation “Art and Commerce: Chicago Theatre 1900 – 1920,” notes that the critics seemed

---

<sup>226</sup> Wallace, David H. “Donald Robertson, The Idealist.” *New York Dramatic Mirror* Oct. 15, 1913: n. pag. Print. n. pag.

<sup>227</sup> Ravinia is now known as an outdoor summer music festival and home of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In 1907, it was an amusement park which had been created to entice riders onto the commuter railroad that connected it to the city. “Ravinia: History.” <http://www.ravinia.org/History.aspx>

somewhat incredulous of Robertson and his company in their early months at Ravinia, particularly in light of the recent New Theatre debacle; particularly noteworthy was the sense of ensemble in their performance, and the obvious care Robertson had put into the company and the productions.<sup>228</sup> The newspaper critics treated the company as something of a novelty: advanced amateurs, well-taught and well-directed: “. . . the results of a guiding spirit that has a clean, definite intent and idea, an enthusiasm which tells of a sincere love for the work in hand, and a sense of artistic proportion that is as enjoyable as it is rarely encountered in the average offering of dramatic organizations.<sup>229</sup>

Ravinia is located just a few train stops from the suburb of Lake Forest: home of Arthur Aldis, Hobart Chatfield-Taylor, and other wealthy supporters of the New Theatre venture. It seems highly likely that the Ravinia season served to acquaint Aldis, Chatfield-Taylor and others with Robertson's work. These men subsequently became supporters and helped Robertson parlay the Ravinia engagement into a booking at the Garrick, a large Shubert-owned theatre in downtown Chicago.<sup>230</sup> There, the Donald Robertson Players performed their repertory as a matinee series, four days per week. Tribune critic W.L. Hubbard reported that the matinees would be presented “regardless of the financial results of the undertaking.”<sup>231</sup> It is not clear what the exact financial arrangements with the Garrick Theatre were, or how Robertson was funding the company at the time. The company opened at the Garrick on October 7, 1907 with

---

<sup>228</sup> Czechowski 75.

<sup>229</sup> Hubbard, W. L. "Donald Robertson Leading Able Company at Ravinia." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Sep 15, 1907: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.

<sup>230</sup> Highlander MA thesis 45.

<sup>231</sup> Hubbard, W.L. "Mrs. Besant Pleads for Art to Save Nation from Decay." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Sep 22, 1907: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.

Moliere's *The Miser*.<sup>232</sup> Robertson's efforts were lauded by the critics, but did not come close to filling the 1,300-seat theatre. In November, the Garrick management announced that it wanted \$5,000 for use of the theatre for the next twenty weeks. Robertson and his supporters undertook a subscription campaign to keep the company going; however, in December it was announced that the company would instead move their matinee series to the Fine Arts Building.

As the name implies, the Fine Arts Building is devoted to artist studios, dance studios, galleries, publishing companies and various arts-related enterprises, located across the street from the Art Institute.<sup>233</sup> There, the Robertson company presented a Wednesday matinee and Saturday evening show, supplemented with additional performances around the city. Their schedule had to be exhausting: for the week of February 9, 1908: "The Donald Robertson company this week will fit the following engagements: Monday, Madison Wis., 'The Miser'; Tuesday, Oak Park; Wednesday afternoon, Music Hall; Thursday, Hull House, Friday night, Music Hall, Giacosa's 'As the Leaves.'"<sup>234</sup> This type of schedule was common for the company at the time.

While Robertson proved adept at obtaining support from Chicago's social and cultural elite, such as Aldis and Chatsworth-Taylor, his work was not reaching a popular audience.

---

<sup>232</sup> Highlander MA thesis 45.

<sup>233</sup> In 1907, the Fine Arts Building was the home of Anna Morgan's studio, and within a few years would also house the Chicago Little Theatre. Robertson's group performed in the Music Hall, which today is known as the Playhouse. It seats approximately 450.

<sup>234</sup> "In the Theaters." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb. 9, 1908: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 9 June 2016.

*Tribune* critic Burns Mantle dramatized this in his review of *As the Leaves*, which began with the following scene:

“I’m afraid,” remarked Hobart Chatfield Chatfield-Taylor<sup>235</sup> yesterday afternoon as he reflectively surveyed the rows of empty seats in Fine Arts Music hall, where the Donald Robertson company was presenting “As the Leaves,” one of the last plays written by the late Giuseppe Giacosa of Italy and the universe, “I’m afraid that if you were to place a sign at the entrance to this hall reading, ‘The Higher Drama – Admittance Free,’ no one would enter.”

“And why, Mr. Taylor, do you think so?” ventured an inquisitive interlocutor.

“Surely there are enough subscribers to the better drama movement to make a good showing.”

“Alas,” replied Mr. Taylor, with shades of both regret and disappointment in his tone, “alas – even they do not come. And why? Because they think it is an educational movement. As a matter of fact Robertson is trying to present interesting plays, and people who enjoy interesting plays would not suffer being educated here any more than they would in any other theatre.”

“It is regrettable,” observed the interlocutor.

“It is,” replied Mr. Taylor. “Any reference to an ‘art theater’ seems to frighten rather than to attract playgoers.”

---

<sup>235</sup> This *is* his real name. He was usually referred to as “H.C. Chatfield-Taylor” in the press. Using his full name was done for comic effect.

And, as if determined to do his part, whatever his disappointment, he rejoined Arthur Aldis and sat through the remaining two acts.”<sup>236</sup>

Clearly, the aura of elitism that the New Theatre created dogged Robertson’s efforts, and would haunt others throughout the decade. At the end of the season, Mantle had kind words regarding Robertson’s professionalism and ethics, particularly in contrast to the disappointments of the New Theatre.

During the season recently closed Mr. Robertson kept every promise he made the subscribers who aided him with their donations if not with the inspiration of their presence at his performances. He fulfilled his contracts, despite all manner of discouragements. His best players were always leaving him, his brother decamped with the best piece of property he uncovered (Giacosa’s “As the Leaves”), a certain local playwright who has achieved fame and fortune unexpectedly within the last two years broke faith with him on two occasions, and many of his most earnest supporters advised him to give up and retire. But despite these handicaps, Mr. Robertson succeeded in establishing a repertoire that is, as he contends, absolutely unique in the history of affairs dramatic in this country.<sup>237</sup>

---

<sup>236</sup> Mantle, Burns. “News of the Theaters” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872 – 1922) Feb. 6, 1908: 8. ProQuest. Web. 17 May 2018.

<sup>237</sup> Mantle, Burns. “News of the Theaters.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) May 16, 1908: 10. ProQuest. Web. 17 May 2018. Some context may be in order: Robertson’s brother, Robert Robertson was a theatrical manager in England. The context of him “making off with” *As the Leaves* is unknown. “A certain local playwright” is undoubtedly William Vaughan Moody. Robertson was instrumental in getting Moody’s first play, *The Great Divide*, produced, probably in the hopes of being able to stage it himself. Moody never returned the favor.

Clearly, Robertson had earned the support of the critics, if not the support of a sustainable audience base.

In July, the president of the board of trustees for the Art Institute offered the Robertson Company the use of Fullerton Hall, to produce shows on Tuesday evenings for thirty weeks beginning in October 1908. The offer was a mixed blessing: while the company did not have to pay rent, they also could not charge admission to Art Institute members or students, or even hold reserved seats for paying customers. Further, the inclusion of theatre within the walls of the Art Institute helped to reinforce the idea of theatre as art, rather than entertainment; but this also contributed to the perception of exclusivity and effeteness surrounding Robertson's work. Robertson had some donors and subscribers who helped underwrite the costs of producing at the Art Institute, and Newlin reports that in 1908, Robertson obtained support from Ira Nelson Morris, "a millionaire meat packer," which helped underwrite the costs of producing at the Art Institute.<sup>238</sup> However, Thomas Wood-Stevens reported that "... about two-thirds of the expense had to be met by Robertson himself, to be earned on the road between weekly performances."<sup>239</sup>

The company was in residence at the Art Institute for two seasons, until June 1910. Attendance figures were regularly published in the *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago* but given in terms of quarterly attendance, i.e., "10 plays, Donald Robertson Company, 3,566,"<sup>240</sup> which makes it is difficult to assess how successful individual plays or performances may have

---

<sup>238</sup> Newlin 4.

<sup>239</sup> Stevens, Thomas Wood. "Robertson: A Record." *The Play-Book* May 1913: 3 – 9. Print. 7.

<sup>240</sup> "Lecture Attendance." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 3.1 (1909): 7. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 May 2018.



been. In the October 1909 *Bulletin*, it was announced that the performances would move from Wednesday to Saturday nights, and that a reservation system would be instituted, which would seem to indicate a greater public demand.

The second season started badly, with a production of *Tartuffe*. Even critic James O'Donnell Bennett of the *Record-Herald*, a longtime supporter of Robertson's work, gave it poor reviews and questioned why the young actors of the company were not being trained properly. Czechowski notes that it is difficult to know if Robertson's leadership was faltering, or if the decline in quality had more to do with the quality of actors he had to work with. Regardless of the cause, his productions were losing support from the critics.<sup>241</sup> Thomas Wood Stevens, in a 1913 article, notes that turnover within the company was a problem: following his season at the Fine Arts Building and again after the first season at the Art Institute, Robertson lost his more experienced student actors and had to bring in new people.<sup>242</sup> Constant changes in the acting company meant that it was difficult to keep popular plays in repertory, and the sense of ensemble was often lacking. Czechowski states that following *Tartuffe*, the company received no reviews for the rest of the season, until their final play, Sheridan's *The Critic*, which was reviewed only by James O'Donnell Bennett.<sup>243</sup> In March 1910, it was announced that Robertson had been cast to play the lead in *Beethoven*, a "dramatic biography" of the composer. Ironically, the play was at the New Theatre in New York, the much-publicized attempt at creating an endowed theatre, which was the catalyst for Chicago's own jealous

---

<sup>241</sup> Czechowski 90.

<sup>242</sup> Stevens 7.

<sup>243</sup> Czechowski 90.

attempt to do the same, which in turn had scuttled Robertson's initial plans with the Chicago Woman's Club.<sup>244</sup> The productions at the Art Institute ended.

Robertson was absent from Chicago during the 1910-11 theatre season. He received good reviews for *Beethoven* and spent the rest of the year working on his next endeavor: the Chicago Theatre Society.<sup>245</sup> The Society was to be the sponsor-organization to support art theatre in Chicago: subscriptions to the society would be used to establish a fund which would cover expenses for a theatre company to do a ten-week season in Chicago. This professional theatre company was to be known as the Drama Players, led by Donald Robertson. In "Uplifting the Stage: Hamlin Garland and the Chicago Theatre Society," Keith Newlin writes that:

The Chicago Theatre Society was an important though now largely forgotten organization. The newspaper drama critics' universal championing of its goals helped educate audiences about the nature and function of avant-garde drama and prepared them for other theatres that followed the path the Society had blazed. It was instrumental in demonstrating how – and equally important – how not to sponsor innovative drama to "uplift" the masses. Its lessons proved influential for other organizations, such as Maurice Browne's more successful Chicago Little Theatre, which in turn provided a model for the Washington Square Players and the Provincetown Players.<sup>246</sup>

---

<sup>244</sup> "'Beethoven' at New Theatre." *New York Times (1857-1922)* Mar. 15, 1910: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.

<sup>245</sup> "Life of Beethoven at New Theatre" *New York Times (1857 – 1922)* Apr. 12, 1910: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2017.

<sup>246</sup> Newlin 2.

Aiding Robertson in this endeavor was novelist Hamlin Garland. Garland had a longstanding interest in dramatic reform: he had been a friend of playwright James A. Herne and his wife, actress and director Katherine Corcoran Herne when he lived in Boston, and had been involved in getting Herne's groundbreaking play *Margaret Fleming* staged. Garland had been impressed by Robertson's production of *Rosmersholm* at the Fine Arts Building in October of 1907 and became both a friend and patron. Newlin writes that Robertson's dramatic vision reinvigorated Garland's theatrical ambitions.

In February 1911, Garland and Robertson met at the Cliff Dwellers Club to discuss plans, and on May 9, 1911 the *Tribune* announced the organization of the Chicago Theatre Society, with Garland as the chairman of the organization committee. The committee included many of Robertson's longtime supporters: N.H. Carpenter, secretary of the Art Institute; Ira Nelson Morris, Robertson's backer at the Art Institute; sculptor (and Garland's brother-in-law) Lorado Taft; budding playwright and society member Kenneth Sawyer Goodman; and Goodman's friend Thomas Wood Stevens of the Art Institute. Edith Rockefeller McCormick headed a list of guarantors that included many other impressive names from Chicago's social and cultural elite.<sup>247</sup> Garland was later elected Secretary of the organization, and was responsible for coordinating play selection, publicity, and handling bookings and contractual arrangements for the organization.<sup>248</sup>

---

<sup>247</sup> "Plan Endowed Theater to Aid Chicago Drama." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* May 9, 1911: 6. ProQuest. Web. 13 Dec. 2013.

<sup>248</sup> Newlin 6.

The Chicago Theatre Society was comprised of three entities: the Society itself, a membership-based organization that acted as the producer; the Drama Players, the resident theatre company under Robertson's direction; and the Shubert organization, which owned the theatre and acted as business manager for the company. The idea behind the Chicago Theatre Society was to create a supporting institution to underwrite the theatre company, and leave the business side of company management to professionals, which would allow the director of the company – Robertson - to focus on the art.<sup>249</sup> The society eventually had 100 subscribers and a guarantee fund of \$70,000.<sup>250</sup> The plan was greeted with enthusiasm by the press and theatre-  
uplifting public: success seemed certain due to Robertson's good reputation, as well as the enthusiastic support and involvement of Edith Rockefeller McCormick and other moneyed donors.

Problems soon arose between Robertson and Garland over play selection, and the results echoed the dissatisfaction surrounding the New Theatre's season. The process of selecting a ten-play season involved taking suggestions from Society members, which were then filtered through Robertson and Garland, and ultimately subject to final approval by the Shuberts. Garland was adamant about presenting new plays by American authors, while Robertson wanted to focus on great plays, without regard to the author's nationality.<sup>251</sup> In July, Garland made public a list of plays for the first season, without the approval of the Society, the Shuberts, or Robertson. Robertson responded in kind by sending out his *own* list of plays to the press. The dispute over play selection was detrimental: several conflicting stories appeared in

---

<sup>249</sup> Newlin 5.

<sup>250</sup> Czechowski 96.

<sup>251</sup> Newlin 7.

the press regarding the upcoming season, leaving the public confused as to what would be offered. The eventual season line-up was a compromise that satisfied no one: Molière's *The Learned Ladies*, Pinero's *The Thunderbolt*, Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*, *The Stronger* by Giacosa, *The Passing of the Torch* by Hervieu, Goldoni's *The Coffee House*, and – on Garland's insistence and against Robertson's judgement - three plays by American authors: *Gold* by Ancilla Hunter, *June Madness* by Henry K. Webster, and *The Maternal Instinct* by Robert Herrick and Harrison Rhodes.<sup>252</sup>

Robertson recruited his ensemble of professional actors in New York and began rehearsals there. The company opened their season in New York City on November 6, with Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* followed by Pinero's *The Thunderbolt*. The shows received generally favorable reviews, although the New York critics were unclear as to the aims of the Drama Players and judged the work by commercial theatre standards. The Drama Players, billed as "Chicago's Own Company," opened in Chicago on February 4 at the Lyric Theatre, a small Shubert-owned house.<sup>253</sup> The Irish Players were scheduled to open the same night, and voluntarily agreed to delay performing *Playboy of the Western World*, so as not to overshadow the Drama Players opening night. They performed eight shows per week, of three different plays from their repertory, for ten weeks. Their production of *The Thunderbolt* was praised by the Chicago critics, and their final show, *June Madness*, did well at the box office.

It was not enough, however. The company struggled to find an audience beyond their own subscribers. When they closed, on April 13, 1912, *The Tribune* estimated that they made

---

<sup>252</sup> Newlin 11.

<sup>253</sup> "Display Ad 35 -- No Title." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb. 25, 1912: 1. ProQuest. Web. 25 Jan. 2017.

between \$30,000 and \$35,000 at the box office, but ended with a \$40,000 deficit.<sup>254</sup> Initially, it was assumed in the press that the losses were not enough to preclude a return engagement of the Drama Players, but in 1914, *The Nation* reported that the losses had consumed about 60 percent of the Society's guarantee fund. The Chicago Theatre Society continued, but did not renew the Drama Players for a second season.<sup>255</sup>

Following the close of their first season, there were several post-mortems in the press. Much of the criticism focused on the play selection. *The Drama* magazine noted that the season broke down to three types of plays: classical, modern foreign plays, and American plays; "They divided their repertory among these three classes in the proportion of two, five, and three."<sup>256</sup> The three plays by American authors were deemed unworthy of production. Of the lot, only *June Madness* by H.K. Webster was thought to have had any merit, and was also deemed the most "commercial." The emphasis on plays by American authors was Hamlin Garland's doing. He believed that America had not yet produced a "great" play because of the stranglehold of commercialism on the theatre, and American playwrights need only an opportunity to be produced to show their greatness. *The Drama* concluded that ". . . a candid observer is forced to admit that the late-Chicago season did not prove the thesis."<sup>257</sup>

Despite his record of presenting art theatre on a miniscule budget and under challenging circumstances, Robertson had created an untenable situation for himself in the Chicago Theatre Society. Although the Society was largely his idea, once established, his role

---

<sup>254</sup> "Drama Players End Season." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Apr. 14, 1912: 3. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.

<sup>255</sup> Goodman, Kenneth Sawyer. "Drama – the Chicago Theatre Society." *The Nation* 19 Mar. 1914: 308-9. Print. 309.

<sup>256</sup> Lovett, Robert Moses. "The Season of the Chicago Theatre Society. *The Drama* May 1912: 298 – 259. Print. 244.

<sup>257</sup> Lovett 250.

within it as director of the Drama Players made him an employee of the organization. Additionally, he was responsible to a governing board that did not consistently agree with him, and a secretary – Garland – with whom he came to frequently disagree. Dickinson notes, “The whole thing lacked the genius of the leader to fuse elements into a whole. An inspiring leader through the wilderness Robertson lost his scepter when he reached the temple.”<sup>258</sup>

The Chicago Theatre Society was active the next season, but Robertson and the Drama Players were not part of it. In *The Nation*, board member Kenneth Sawyer Goodman wrote, “. . . the Society found it impossible to raise enough funds to repeat the experiment with the same or a similar company.” The Society became a presenting rather than a producing organization, bringing Dublin’s Abbey Theatre, Winthrop Ames’ Little Theatre of New York, Hull-House Players, Miss Horniman’s Players from Manchester, England, and other groups presenting the new drama to Chicago.<sup>259</sup> In their third season, they again sponsored a repertory company, directed by B. Iden Payne from the Irish Players, but on a much more modest scale than Robertson’s Drama Players. The Society continued to lose money, and soon disappeared.

The loss of support from the Chicago Theatre Society had to have been a serious blow to Robertson, both professionally and personally. In the fall of 1913, Robertson arranged another tour of the Drama Players, which were described in the *New York Dramatic Mirror* as “now under his own personal direction.”<sup>260</sup> A new company was hired, and a brief tour occurred, but it did not generate much in the way of critical acclaim or ticket sales. Robertson disappeared

---

<sup>258</sup> Dickinson 34.

<sup>259</sup> Goodman 308.

<sup>260</sup> Wallace n. pag.

from the news entirely in 1914, and reappeared in 1915 having authored a book of poetry, dedicated to his benefactor, Edith Rockefeller McCormick. He continued to do lectures and speaking engagements to community groups about theatre and drama, and direct benefit productions for women's groups. He directed several pageants, a form of outdoor drama that was popular at the time. He wrote, directed, and staged several in the Midwest throughout the late 1910s and early 1920s. He attempted to found another organization along the lines of the Chicago Theatre Society, to be called the Chicago Civic Theatre, in the 1920s. He died in 1926, and the Civic Theatre effort was left unrealized.<sup>261</sup>

In his quest to realize his vision of an ideal theatre, Robertson and his various companies established and embodied many of the dispositions that would come to characterize Chicago's Off-Loop theatre. His personal narrative – of coming to Chicago to start the theatre of his dreams – is one that continues to resonate with Chicago theatre artists. It has become part of the habitus, and Robertson's may be the earliest instance of someone coming to Chicago (as opposed to New York), to start a theatre company. That his ideal theatre was always envisioned as an ensemble is also a significant disposition. Robertson was an established actor with some degree of name recognition when he settled in Chicago, yet he was by no means the star of his Chicago companies; rather, all of his efforts operated as ensembles, with Robertson sharing equal billing with other group members.<sup>262</sup> Often, he did so alongside his own acting students, with apparently little ego involved on his part.

---

<sup>261</sup> "6,000 Memberships for Civic Theater Society Are Reported." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) May 21, 1924: 25. *ProQuest*. Web. 7 Dec. 2013; "Robertson, Noted Stage Veteran, Dies." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) May 21, 1926: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 7 Dec. 2013

<sup>262</sup> While it is true that his early companies performing at Ravinia and the Art Institute bore his name, this seems to have been more by default than design.



It was clear that Robertson cared first and foremost for the work itself. The critics perceived this: he was often praised for his work ethic and dedication to his craft and his company. This also becomes another element of the disposition of Chicago theatre – a respect for those who work hard and pay their dues. Sadly, Robertson never quite achieved what he sought, but he never stopped trying; at the time of his death in 1926, he was involved in yet another effort to start an art theatre. And that, too, becomes part of the habitus – to get back up after a failure and try again. Finally, he took up the challenge Arthur Aldis laid out in “A Theatrical Autopsy”; Robertson’s plan for the Chicago Theatre Society was built upon the knowledge of the New Theatre’s failure.<sup>263</sup> The business model of a subscription-based theatre supported by an endowment would come to characterize the way most Off-Loop theatres would be organized in the 1970s. Robertson’s efforts laid the groundwork for other, more successful, art theatre efforts in the pre-World War I era; for example, Maurice Browne and Ellen Van Volkenburg were just beginning the Chicago Little Theatre when Robertson was ending with the Chicago Theatre Society, and seem to have learned the lesson that “little” was the key to some measure of success for art theatre. Many of the dispositions which would characterize Off-Loop theatre owe their genesis to Robertson: the idea of coming to the city of Chicago, founding an ensemble, and following one’s own particular vision are foundational aspects of the habitus of Off-Loop theatre; as is the ability to try, fail, and try again. In his time, Robertson was grouped with the “uplifters” – those who wished to reform the theatrical tastes of their time, but did not see himself this way. Rather, he was committed to the work itself, and

---

<sup>263</sup> “A Theatrical Autopsy” 129.

passionately so. His words from a 1913 interview would not sound out of place amidst the rhetoric of the Off-Loop theatre movement in the 1970s and 1980s:

The aim of the theater, as I understand it, is enjoyment, rather than amusement. It has a higher mission than that of killing time for us – we kill enough hours in other ways. Don't think for a moment that I believe in using the theater for a pulpit any more than it should be used for sociological discussions or exploitation of sensations. Art is none of these things. It is a simple, sincere, and sane revelation of the spirit of life.<sup>264</sup>

Robertson – in his actions and choices and practices throughout his career in Chicago– enacted many of the dispositions that would become part of the habitus of Off-Loop theatre. The exact path of this transmission is not clear: as Bourdieu noted, habitus is “fuzzy” and “vague;” but once the pattern is set, it can always be reenacted or reactivated.<sup>265</sup> Robertson set some of these patterns at the beginning of the twentieth century, which would become widely enacted fifty years later.

### **The Chicago Little Theatre**

As Robertson's efforts were winding down, the Chicago Little Theatre was beginning. Founded by Maurice Browne and Ellen Van Volkenburg in 1912, it subsequently lent its name to the Little Theatre movement of the 1920s.<sup>266</sup> Although it may not have been the first art

---

<sup>264</sup> Wallace n. pag.

<sup>265</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre and Loïc J.D. Wacquant. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1992. Print. 22

<sup>266</sup> Tingley 131. Browne always gave Jane Addams, Laura Dainty Pelham, and the Hull-House Dramatic Association credit for being the first little theatre

theatre – Browne himself always credited Hull-House- it proved to be the most influential.<sup>267</sup>

Dickinson described it as “a glowing coal sending sparks in many directions.” And its influence went beyond theatre; “. . . when in 1914 Margaret Anderson named her Chicago periodical the *Little Review* – the word ‘little’ would characterize a style and a politics of Modernism.”<sup>268</sup>

During the five-year life of the Little Theatre, Browne published several articles in national theatre magazines on his theories and the theatre’s evolving practices, which helped spread the Little Theatre’s influence far beyond its small Chicago audience.<sup>269</sup> The theatre has been the subject of a considerable amount of scholarship: notably Bernard Dukore’s 1957 dissertation, “Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre,” and Jan Charles Czechowski’s 1982 dissertation “Art and Commerce: Chicago Theatre, 1900 – 1920.” It has also been the subject of several articles, most notably “Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre” by Charles Lock, and Donald F. Tingley’s “Ellen Van Volkenburg, Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre.” The following section draws on these studies.

Dukore determines that the Little Theatre did not innovate so much as put existing theory into practice:

Maurice Browne advanced the ideas of a non-commercial dramatic literature, a non-professional theatre, unity of production under the guidance of a single directing mind, and the new stagecraft; and he put these ideas into practice in his productions at the Chicago Little Theatre. However, he was not the only

---

<sup>267</sup> Browne, Maurice. *Too Late to Lament: An Autobiography*. London: Gollancz, 1955. Print. 128.

<sup>268</sup> Dickinson 149; Lock, Charles. "Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre." *Modern Drama* 31.1 (1988): 106-116. Print. 109.

<sup>269</sup> Dukore, Bernard. "Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre." Diss. U of Illinois, 1957. Print. 126.

person, not even the only person in America to do so. Maurice Browne was an early practitioner, and in some instances, the first in America. He crystallized at the Chicago Little Theatre what was in the air at the time.<sup>270</sup>

The Little Theatre garnered national attention due to Browne's articles and subsequent coverage of their activities in theatrical and literary magazines, but locally their reputation and influence were somewhat ambiguous. Chicago's theatre critics - steeped in commercial theatre and having watched two other attempts at theatrical reform flounder - were not always sure what to make of the group. The quality of the acting was most often faulted. At best, critics admired their experimentation, dedication, and fearlessness; at worst their work was described as overly-serious, pretentious, and amateurish.<sup>271</sup>

The theatre was founded by Englishman Maurice Browne and his wife, Chicagoan Ellen Van Volkenburg. Browne was born in England in 1881 to a wealthy family. He had an adventurous spirit and a love of poetry: he had fought in the Boer War at age eighteen, attended Cambridge, worked as a teacher in India for two years, returned to England and founded a poetry publishing press, and continued to travel the world. In 1910, while in Florence, Italy, he met Ellen Van Volkenburg, the daughter of a salesman for Chicago's meatpacking industry. She had graduated from University of Michigan and wanted to be an actress. Her parents found this unsuitable, so Van Volkenburg - who had the unusual ability to recite and reenact entire plays from memory after a single viewing - parlayed this talent into the next best thing: she worked as a one-woman novelty entertainer, performing for women's

---

<sup>270</sup> Dukore 125-6.

<sup>271</sup> Tingley 138.

clubs and in the homes of the wealthy.<sup>272</sup> Browne and Van Volkenburg were engaged within four days of meeting.<sup>273</sup>

Browne followed her to Chicago, where he tried to make a living as a college lecturer and writer, but soon the couple decided to start a theatre.<sup>274</sup> Browne describes the founding of the theatre as being driven by Van Volkenburg's ambition to be "a 'really-truly' actress," his own desire to write "masterpieces of poetic drama," and their shared disdain for the commercial theatre. The Irish Players' visit to Chicago in 1912 provided the impetus for the couple to start a theatre. Browne recounts the advice they received from Lady Gregory:

By all means start your own theatre; but make it in your own image. Don't engage professional players; they have been spoiled for your purpose. Engage and train, as we of the Abbey have done, amateurs; shopgirls, school-teachers, counter-jumpers; cut-throat-thieves rather than professionals. And prepare to have your hearts broken.<sup>275</sup>

The couple had no experience, money, or – one could argue – talent when they started their theatre. Dukore notes that of the two, Browne was perhaps more versed in modern theatre, he had seen the Abbey Players and read Gordon Craig, but had no actual experience as an actor or director.<sup>276</sup>

---

<sup>272</sup> Tingley 133.

<sup>273</sup> Tingley 132.

<sup>274</sup> Browne, *Too Late to Lament* 112.

<sup>275</sup> Browne, *Too Late to Lament* 116.

<sup>276</sup> Dukore 8-9.

They used a \$500 wedding present to found their theatre.<sup>277</sup> Unable to afford a traditional theatre, they rented an office space in the Fine Arts Building on fourth-floor at the back of the building, and converted it into a performance space.<sup>278</sup> It was clearly based on the stage in Anna Morgan's studio, where Van Volkenburg had once studied.<sup>279</sup> There, they built a small proscenium stage, fifteen feet wide, eighteen feet deep, and just under twelve feet high. The house seated 99, and – in contrast to the stage facilities – was comfortable and elegant. The audience area was long, narrow, and carpeted; prompting some critics to compare it to seeing a play performed in a hotel corridor.<sup>280</sup> One of the interesting features of the space was the tearoom: tea was sold at intermission, after the show, and on weekdays from 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.<sup>281</sup> The impression created by the Little Theatre's space was more that of a temple than a place of amusement; Dukore notes, "They (the critics) often called the Little Theatre a shrine, and a performance there a ritual."<sup>282</sup>

The temple-like atmosphere evoked by the Little Theatre's space was a reflection of their approach to theatre: Browne, in a 1914 article titled "The New Rhythmic Drama," stated, "Art, in common with all religions, needs its ritual and priesthood."<sup>283</sup> In a 1956 interview, Van Volkenburg said: "We were serving an ideal...everyone was deeply involved in that ideal. There were no rules or limitations, only an avid desire to work."<sup>284</sup> Browne, Van Volkenburg, and

---

<sup>277</sup> Tingley 134.

<sup>278</sup> Tingley 135.

<sup>279</sup> Morgan 61.

<sup>280</sup> Czechowski 59.

<sup>281</sup> Dukore 54.

<sup>282</sup> Dukore 42.

<sup>283</sup> Dukore 42.

<sup>284</sup> Dukore 39.

their ensemble embodied this “blind enthusiasm and total commitment” to an ideal, poetic drama.<sup>285</sup>

The cult-like devotion to a mission combined with their inexperience became apparent with their approach to one of their first shows, *The Trojan Women*. They began rehearsals in a studio belonging to sculptor and dancer Lou Wall Moore, located in the 57<sup>th</sup> Street bohemian colony.<sup>286</sup> Moore wished to play Cassandra, and, since it was her studio, she did. Van Volkenburg played Hecuba. The rest of the ensemble was largely drawn from Van Volkenburg’s circle of friends and acquaintances – educated young women from Chicago’s social elite and bohemian fringe. They rehearsed nine hours a day for eleven months, with no scheduled performance in sight. “Presumably it was this long period of extraordinarily detached theatre – rehearsal as its own end and justification – that led Browne and his players to arrive at their ideas and ideals of drama.”<sup>287</sup> The staging of the chorus was especially noteworthy, as the actresses moved and spoke in unison. The play eventually opened as the Little Theatre’s third production, in January 1913, and would become their most famous.

Browne was influenced by the ideas of Gordon Craig in regards to directing, in that he felt that a theatre production needed to be the vision of one person controlling all elements. This was not a widely-held idea at the time, so much so that Browne thought it necessary to write, “the staging of each play is designed in all its details by one person, so that a perfect unity of effect is obtained. . .” into the prospectus for the theatre’s first season. This approach

---

<sup>285</sup> Czechowski 53.

<sup>286</sup> They began rehearsing the play before the space at the Fine Arts building was renovated.

<sup>287</sup> Lock 108.

was also part of what made the Little Theatre revolutionary. Dukore writes, “. . . readers of that prospectus were not amused at an assertion of what was taken for granted, but were impressed by the fact that a step was being made in the direction of a greatly needed theatrical reform.”<sup>288</sup>

The ensemble were amateurs, and usually featured a preponderance of women: generally, only wealthy and unmarried women could devote their time to working at the theatre for no pay.<sup>289</sup> Late in the first season, several company members challenged Browne’s “autocratic” leadership; when the issues could not be resolved, approximately half the company left. The ensemble appears to have been very loose-knit – Dukore notes that over 100 people appeared in Little Theatre plays over the course of five seasons.<sup>290</sup> The sought-after acting qualities were characterized as simplicity and sincerity, based within the text of the play: “Maurice Browne trained each actor first to discover the total meaning of the play, and then to relate his role to that meaning. Although the acting was sometimes poor, the playwright’s meaning usually emerged.”<sup>291</sup> Browne never went as far as Stanislavsky in formulating a theoretical approach, but the acting on the Little Theatre’s stage was generally characterized as a striving for honesty, built upon psychologically-based motivations. The actors received instruction in voice, movement, dance and other performance skills, although they primarily learned their craft by performing.<sup>292</sup> The emphasis on simplicity and sincerity were conscious oppositions to acting conventions within the commercial theatre, but were also likely driven by

---

<sup>288</sup> Dukore 62.

<sup>289</sup> Dukore 46.

<sup>290</sup> Dukore 144.

<sup>291</sup> Dukore 56.

<sup>292</sup> Dukore 59.



the physical limitations of the Little Theatre: the small stage and close proximity of the audience demanded a “smaller” acting style.

In addition to directing and acting, the Little Theatre was significant in terms of its approach to lighting and stage design. Browne and Van Volkenburg were influenced by the “new stagecraft” of the era, especially the ideas of Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia, and shared an avid interest in stage lighting. The Little Theatre had a remarkable lighting set-up considering their small budget.<sup>293</sup> Dukore notes that their design innovations were often driven by necessity: the theatre’s small stage and financial constraints demanded simplicity, which often translated into a reliance on lighting rather than scenery to create mood and indicate scene.

The Little Theatre’s original commitment to “create and produce a poetic drama,” suggest that they focused on plays in verse. Although they staged some “poetic” plays such as Yeats’ *On Baile’s Strand*, and Cloyd Head’s *Grotesques*; Browne came to think of “poetry” in broader terms, akin to Donald Robertson’s ideas of what constituted “literary” drama. Over time, Browne refined his idea of a “poetic” drama, and published them a 1914 essay, “The New Rhythmic Drama” in *Drama* magazine. Browne states that a production was “a rhythmic fusion of light, movement, and sound,” that met “on a plane of conventionalization.”<sup>294</sup> He recognized that rhythms exist in dialogue, movement, light, and scenery, and sought to bring them into a unified whole in his productions. His ideas evolved over time, and came about through the

---

<sup>293</sup> Dukore 82.

<sup>294</sup> Dukore 92.

rehearsal process – the *Trojan Women* rehearsals in particular - in this way, the Little Theatre was a laboratory for modern theatre practices.

The Little Theatre usually staged five productions per season, and many bills were evenings of one-acts. In all they produced 48 plays over the course of five years: 18 were world premieres, and 7 were American premieres.<sup>295</sup> They did the Gilbert Murray translations of *The Trojan Women* and *Medea*; Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler*; George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *The Philanderer*, and *Candida*; Strindberg's *Creditors*, *Pariah*, and *The Stronger*; Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*; Yeats' *On Baile's Strand* and *The Shadowy Waters*.

Unlike the Chicago Theatre Society, the company made no pretense to foster American playwrights, but did so in its presentation of work written by ensemble members and friends: an evening of one-acts by Mary Aldis, Cloyd Head's *Grotesques*, *The Happy Prince* by Lou Wall Moore and Margaret Allen, Florence Kiper Frank's *Jael*, and Browne's *The King of the Jews*. They also created a company-devised piece, *The Chicago Little Theatre Passion Play*, which told the story of the crucifixion using voiceovers and silhouettes.<sup>296</sup>

*The Trojan Women* became the company's signature piece: it opened January 7, 1913. It was revived in March of 1914, but this was essentially a new production due to the departure of several original ensemble members. In April 1915, the production went on tour, sponsored by the Women's Peace Party as part of the American anti-war effort. The company gave forty-two performances in thirty-three cities, and it is estimated that 33,000 people saw the show. Although the tour brought the Little Theatre's work to a large audience, it created several

---

<sup>295</sup> Dukore 29.

<sup>296</sup> Dukore 141 - 43.

issues for the group: despite support from the Women's Peace Party and donations, the company was left with a \$4,000 debt; it also created an unfavorable association in the public mind between the Chicago Little Theatre and the anti-war movement at a time when nationalism and pro-war sentiment ran high.<sup>297</sup>

In the summer of 1914, Browne and Van Volkenburg traveled to Europe. Although they met some of the pioneers of avant-garde theatre – Max Reinhardt, Harley Granville-Barker, Jacques Copeau, and Gordon Craig - the most significant event on this trip was Van Volkenburg's introduction to puppetry as a theatrical form.<sup>298</sup> Van Volkenburg brought examples of German folk marionettes back to Chicago to use as models, and worked with a sculptor and company members to refine them into graceful and expressive figures. She experimented with staging, movement techniques and mechanics, and approached puppetry as putting on a play using figures rather than actors, "We rebelled against the phrase, 'simple little puppet plays for children.'" <sup>299</sup> In February, 1915, the Little Theatre presented their first puppet play, *The Deluded Dragon*, based on a Japanese legend. The company presented six puppet plays in 1915 and 1916, often based on fairytales: *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, and *The Little Mermaid*. In 1916, the company presented *A Midsummer Night's Dream (disarranged for her puppets by Ellen Van Volkenburg)*, which Browne remembered as one of the best pieces of theatre he ever saw:

---

<sup>297</sup> Tingley 140.

<sup>298</sup> Lock 111.

<sup>299</sup> Dukore 21.

I know at least that, were I granted the wish to see again one of those breathtaking performances which in a long life I have seen so many times, I would choose, not Duse as Francesca, not the elder Schildkraut as Shylock, not Barrymore as Richard the Third, not even Nellie Van as Hecuba; I would choose, unhesitatingly, the fairy-scenes as played by Nellie Van's puppets in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.<sup>300</sup>

Although the plays were intended for children, they were popular with critics and general audiences.

The Little Theatre was under constant financial pressure, and began to unravel in 1916. Money to run the company came from yearly subscriptions, which cost \$10, and lifetime memberships which cost \$50: Tingley states that in their first season, they had twelve life members, and 237 "ordinary" members, in their second season, twenty-nine life members, 299 ordinary members.<sup>301</sup> Browne used this money to meet his operating expenses, and proved that he could stretch a dollar when it came to production costs:

In 1917, Thomas H. Dickinson pointed with pride to Sam Hume's Arts and Crafts Theatre in Detroit, where "each production is made at an average cost of \$800 compared with the cost per production of \$1500 for the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Washington Square Players." Yet on January 13, 1914,

---

<sup>300</sup> Browne, *Too Late to Lament* 195.

<sup>301</sup> Tingley 140; Dukore 14.

Maurice Browne announced that he had produced eighteen plays at a total cost of \$800.<sup>302</sup>

Tickets for all shows were \$1.00, and members paid half price; but with only ninety-nine seats, there was little chance of earning enough income to meet expenses. The company had opened its doors \$7,000 in debt due to renovations on the space. Several large donations went towards reducing the debt over time, but it was never eliminated, and the *Trojan Women* tour only added to it.

In November 1916, the Little Theatre arranged to stage *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in the Playhouse of the Fine Arts Building.<sup>303</sup> It was hoped that the production would buoy the theatre's finances: the Playhouse had 450 seats, and Shaw's plays had proved popular in the past. However, a misunderstanding between Browne and the management of the Fine Arts Building over rental payments led to the company being locked out of the theatre for a week, which further escalated the financial crisis for the company. The entry of the U.S. into World War I brought about the end of the Little Theatre at the Fine Arts Building; public attention was consumed with the war effort, and the Little Theatre was identified with the anti-war movement due to its tour of *Medea*, sponsored by the Women's Peace Party.<sup>304</sup> Browne gave up the Little Theatre's space in the Fine Arts Building.

In February 1917, he sent a letter to subscribers detailing the dire finances of the Little Theatre and soliciting subscriptions. Based on the response, Browne arranged the next season.

---

<sup>302</sup> Dukore 15.

<sup>303</sup> This was formerly called Music Hall and was the same space that Donald Robertson had used.

<sup>304</sup> Dukore 29.

He rented Central Music Hall and presented productions of *Candida* and *Medea* - Shaw and Euripedes had always done well for the company in the past; however, "... sixty per cent of the subscribers failed to meet their pledges and pay their dues for the season, and ninety-five per cent of them did not attend either of the two opening productions."<sup>305</sup> Browne announced the end of the Chicago Little Theatre on December 7, 1917. The company ended life \$10,500 in debt.<sup>306</sup>

In many ways, the Little Theatre was a forerunner of Off-Loop theatre; many of their practices and problems foretold what Off-Loop theatres would contend with sixty years later, and have become dispositions for the habitus of Off-Loop theatre. The Little Theatre's precarious finances are one of the most prominent: the company always operated on a shoestring budget – in their rush to create theatre, they began to rehearse their first production without an adequate endowment or other financial reserves, and relied upon the personal finances of the founders and the goodwill and support of the ensemble, their friends, and family. This would become a familiar story for Off-Loop theatre companies, as passion for the work outstrips external support. Fortunately, many of the Little Theatre's ensemble members came from Chicago's social elite, and the company survived based on these connections for a time. The Little Theatre began existence with a great deal of enthusiasm and energy, and its founders learned over time that this is not a substitute for money when the rent on the theatre is due. The lack of money also drove creativity in staging and scenery, and the Little Theatre is credited with putting the "new stagecraft" before Chicago audiences, which helped it to gain

---

<sup>305</sup> Dukore 29.

<sup>306</sup> Dukore 14.

acceptance in the US. The converted performance space, another result of limited funds, and resulting financial challenges, are also a disposition of the habitus: the company began in debt, no doubt because of the expenses involved in converting what had been a storage area into a theatre space.

One of the most significant achievements of the Little Theatre that is important to the habitus of Off-Loop theatre, was its ability to coalesce a community: the Little Theatre became part of the intellectual and bohemian life of the city in a way that no previous art theatre effort had. Whereas Hull-House was by and for the poor, the New Theatre was a society event, and while Donald Robertson's efforts were rooted in European aestheticism, Browne and Van Volkenburg's Little Theatre was by and for the young, the bohemian, and the revolutionary. "Chicago's surging mental life gathered at the Little Theatre."<sup>307</sup> The theatre's downtown location in the Fine Arts Building, its tearoom, and its ensemble of wealthy, single, and attractive actresses are variously cited as reasons for this. Chicago was a center of artistic and particularly literary innovation in the early twentieth century, and Browne's background as a writer and poet made him particularly receptive to this community. Writers such as Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Vachel Lindsay, Maxwell Bodenheim, Eunice Tietjens, Ben Hecht, and Sherwood Anderson were part of the community that developed. The Little Theatre became the theatrical expression of Chicago's Literary Renaissance, simply by giving people of like-mind a place to gather: the theatre hosted discussions for members on Tuesday afternoons, Browne offered lectures on Wednesdays, and the tearoom was open weekday

---

<sup>307</sup> Dukore 31.

afternoons. Anna Morgan noted the social life among the tenants of the Fine Arts Building in its early days – by 1912, the Little Theatre became the center of this bohemian salon.<sup>308</sup>

Although the Little Theatre did not last long, its influence was far-reaching. “Most of the avant-garde bohemian community had moved to New York where several figured prominently in the Greenwich Village arts scene; there, George Cram Cook and Floyd Dell used Browne’s model to shape the Provincetown Players.”<sup>309</sup> World War I dispersed much of this community; but the creation of an artistic community of interest, one that left evidence of its existence in literature, painting, music, and theatre – created a disposition for Off-Loop theatre.

Finally, something that the Little Theatre did that would become significant later was to create their own performance space. When they found that they could not afford a theatre, they created a theatre to suit their needs out of commercial space. They were the first theatre company to do this, and it has become a disposition of Off-Loop theatre: the use of found or converted space. That the company went into debt over this is also, sadly, a disposition.

### **Other Efforts: The “Uplifters”**

The Hull-House Players, Donald Robertson’s companies, the New Theatre, and the Little Theatre were the most visible components of Chicago’s art theatre efforts prior to World War I. They are often thought of and written about as if they were independent efforts with minimal relation to one another, but in practice, they were part of a larger art theatre community or

---

<sup>308</sup> Morgan 61.

<sup>309</sup> Hecht, Stuart J. “The Plays of Alice Gerstenberg: Cultural Hegemony in the American Little Theatre.” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 26.1 (1992): 1–16. *Crossref*. Web. 17 Jan 2017. 5.



“art world,” to borrow Howard S. Becker’s term, in the sense that it was “... an established network of cooperative links among participants”<sup>310</sup> which evolved in Chicago prior to World War I. The aforementioned theatres were simply the more established points within a dynamic community of artists, aesthetes, and the philanthropically-inclined. This community included several individuals who were not affiliated with a single institution, such as Alice Gerstenberg, Kenneth Sawyer Goodman, and Arthur and Mary Aldis, as well as several lesser-known or informal theatre groups, such as the Aldis’ Lake Forest Players, the Players’ Workshop, the Philistine Theatre, and B. Iden Payne’s company. While the better-known art theatre groups at the center of the community tended to be somewhat self-contained, there was considerable overlap and interaction between the groups and individuals who were on the periphery, which speaks to the disposition of collegiality and community that is part of the emerging habitus of Off-Loop theatre. As we shall see, this quality of community within the art scene was present almost from the beginning, and contributed to the disposition of community that characterizes the Off-Loop scene.

### **Kenneth Sawyer Goodman**

Kenneth Sawyer Goodman is the person for whom the Goodman Theatre is named. While the Goodman Theatre will figure prominently in the era between the World Wars and up to the present, the work of its namesake is deeply enmeshed in the art theatre scene that existed in Chicago prior to World War I. “Kenneth Goodman was a participant in almost every significant non-commercial theatre venture attempted in Chicago from 1910 to 1917, either as

---

<sup>310</sup> Becker, Howard Saul. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: U of California Press, 2008. Print. 34.

an organizer or as a playwright, often as both.”<sup>311</sup> Like his contemporary Alice Gerstenberg, Goodman was a playwright and a member of the city’s social elite. He was the only son of lumber company owner William O. Goodman, and was expected to enter the family business. He began writing poetry while in his teens, and won a prize for his poetry while at Princeton. There, a professor suggested that he try writing plays. He graduated in 1906 then spent a year in Wisconsin learning the ins and outs of the lumber industry, before returning to Chicago in 1908 and going into the family business. He spent the next year living the life of a society bachelor; his social circle included members of Chicago’s most prominent families: the McCormicks, Blairs, Henrotins, Armours, Ryersons, and Swifts.<sup>312</sup>

In December 1909, Goodman evidently had some sort of epiphany, and suddenly began to pursue his longstanding interest in writing and art in earnest. He had joined the Cliff Dwellers, a men’s club “. . . where Chicago’s leading genteel artists and philanthropic businessmen could meet.” whose members included Arthur Aldis, Arthur Bissell, Hamlin Garland, and Donald Robertson.<sup>313</sup> Goodman began to take drawing classes at the Art Institute where he met Thomas Wood Stevens, the head of the Illustration Department, who would become both a friend and writing partner.<sup>314</sup> Goodman quickly became involved in theatre activities at the Art Institute – through student groups, working with Stevens on a series of

---

<sup>311</sup> Hecht, Stuart J. "Kenneth Sawyer Goodman: Bridging Chicago's Affluent and Artistic Network." *Theatre History Studies* 13 (1993): 135 - 47. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 Jan. 2017. 143.

<sup>312</sup> Hecht, "Kenneth Sawyer Goodman" 136.

<sup>313</sup> Hecht, "Kenneth Sawyer Goodman" 137.

<sup>314</sup> Thomas Wood Stevens became the first Artistic Director of the Goodman Memorial Theatre.

masques and pageants, and acting in a small role in a Donald Robertson production. Hecht states that “. . . it was as if the young man caught fire.”<sup>315</sup>

Between 1910 and 1913, Goodman and Stevens wrote nine plays together, “. . . mostly masques set in obscure, exotic settings, or history plays reenacting moments in past artists’ lives.” It is likely that the ideas came from Stevens, and Goodman developed characters and dramatic structure. When Stevens left Chicago in 1913 to establish the drama program at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, Goodman began to write on his own; his work transitioned from flowery and formal pageants towards realism. However, he seemed to prefer collaboration, and in 1913 began another writing partnership with journalist Ben Hecht. Together, they wrote seven plays: many of them studies of life in Chicago’s Jewish tenements. Similar to his partnership with Stevens, Hecht supplied the material and Goodman refined it.<sup>316</sup> In 1911, Goodman became treasurer for the Chicago Theatre Society, the project of Donald Robertson and Hamlin Garand. In 1913, the Society sponsored a repertory company headed by English director B. Iden Payne. Goodman and Payne became friends and colleagues, and Payne’s group produced Goodman’s play *The Game of Chess*. Goodman also designed scenery and costumes for the company, and Payne gave Goodman feedback on his writing.<sup>317</sup>

In 1916, Goodman became involved in the Players’ Workshop. “The Players’ specialized in imaginative if rough-hewn productions of new plays by Chicago dramatists. Also writing for the Workshop were Alice Gerstenberg and Mary Aldis, like Goodman members of Chicago’s

---

<sup>315</sup> Hecht, “Kenneth Sawyer Goodman” 137.

<sup>316</sup> Hecht, “Kenneth Sawyer Goodman” 138 – 140.

<sup>317</sup> “Kenneth Sawyer Goodman.” *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 19.6 (1925): 66. JSTOR. Web. 17 May 2018.

<sup>317</sup> Czechowski 90.

moneyed elite who became active playwrights.”<sup>318</sup> The Players’ presented four plays by Goodman and Hecht, and two by Goodman writing on his own.<sup>319</sup> During his lifetime, 30 plays he had written or co-authored were produced, and several were published. Goodman entered the Naval Reserve in May 1917; in November 1918, he contracted the Spanish flu and died, at the age of thirty-five..<sup>320</sup> His parents donated money to the Art Institute to fund an art theatre and training program in his memory: the Goodman Memorial Theatre opened in 1925.<sup>321</sup> His friend Thomas Wood Stevens returned to Chicago to establish the school and lead the theatre. The Goodman Memorial Theatre’s intended mission was to be both a professional art theatre ensemble, and to train the next generation of theatre artists.

Goodman was involved in several art theatre efforts, but not closely identified with any single one. He was an art theatre renaissance man: an artist, an administrator, and patron. He was important because he united his social prominence as the heir of a lumber fortune with his passionate interest in playwriting, often drawing on his business skills and social position in the service of the art theatre. Hecht notes:

Not a visionary in the self-consciously prophetic style of his peers Donald Robertson or Maurice Browne, Goodman quietly propelled himself into the vortex of Chicago’s art theatre community in the years prior to World War One. His background and outlook enabled Goodman to reshape the Chicago art

---

<sup>318</sup> Hecht, “Kenneth Sawyer Goodman” 140.

<sup>319</sup> Dickinson 242.

<sup>320</sup> “Kenneth Sawyer Goodman.” *Bulletin of the Art Institute* 66.

<sup>321</sup> The Goodman Memorial Theatre will be covered in the next chapter.

theatre into an unusually cooperative community, one which featured an openness, enthusiasm, and camaraderie not readily found elsewhere.<sup>322</sup>

This idea of openness and camaraderie is a key disposition of Chicago theatre today. Goodman perhaps fostered this because he was something of an interloper to the art scene: a member of the patron class, with an interest in being an artist himself. In his life, Goodman played both roles – working with Aldis and Bissell on their efforts to “uplift” the drama through the Chicago Theatre Society, and as a working playwright, collaborating with Stevens and Hecht, as well as writing on his own. “Bridging as he did so many groups K (Goodman) could bring people from different circles together, encouraging collaborative creative effort.”<sup>323</sup>

### **Arthur and Mary Aldis and the Lake Forest Players**

Arthur and Mary Aldis were wealthy arts enthusiasts and philanthropists. Arthur was in real estate; his company built such Chicago landmarks as the Rookery, the Marquette, and the Monadnock buildings, and was involved in developing the north shore suburb of Lake Forest. He was a trustee of the Art Institute, a member of the Cliff Dwellers, had been one of the leaders of the New Theatre effort of 1906, and was a board member of the Chicago Theatre Society. His wife, Mary Aldis, was a playwright who built her own playhouse on their Lake Forest estate, and started an informal theatre company, the Lake Forest Players, devoted to the

---

<sup>322</sup> Hecht, "Kenneth Sawyer Goodman" 135.

<sup>323</sup> Hecht, "Kenneth Sawyer Goodman" 143.

new drama. Mary's plays were also produced by the Little Theatre and at the Players' Workshop.<sup>324</sup>

The couple married in 1892 and moved to Lake Forest in 1902. The Aldis estate included a main house, a barn, and several cottages and outbuildings.<sup>325</sup> In 1911, they consulted an architect about building a theatre on the property, but decided against it because of the cost, and the fact that it would destroy their rose garden. Instead, while Arthur was in Europe studying impressionist painting, Mary hired two workmen and converted one of the existing cottages into a playhouse: interior walls were removed to create a one-hundred-seat auditorium, and an addition put on to create an eighteen by thirty-two-foot stage area. Porch areas were enclosed and turned into dressing rooms. Arthur knew nothing of the project, but was pleasantly surprised when he returned from Europe.<sup>326</sup> It was dubbed The Play-House and an amateur theatre group consisting of friends and neighbors developed. These people were also, coincidentally the leaders of Chicago society.

The first performance, of Chicago poet and society member Helen Dudley's play *The Winged Shrine*, took place June 11, 1911. Two new one-acts were presented every other week during the summer, after dinner, for an invited audience. The group presented plays by Shaw, Strindberg, Yeats, Synge, Shaw, Mary Aldis and other members of the Aldis' social circle, such as Helen Dudley and Frances Wells Shaw.<sup>327</sup> It is estimated that they staged about forty-two plays

---

<sup>324</sup> "Mrs. Aldis' Play about Food to be seen at 'Workshop.'" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb. 21, 1918: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.

<sup>325</sup> Kimbrel, Dawn K. *The Aldis Compound*. Lake Forest, IL: Lake Forest Lake Bluff Historical Society, 1994. Print. N. pag.

<sup>326</sup> Kimbrel n. pag.

<sup>327</sup> Kimbrel n. pag.

over the course of three years. Since it was a private theatre and the members of the company were some of the wealthiest people in Chicago, they were viewed more as dilettantes. The group was rarely mentioned in theatrical columns, but - due to their membership - covered extensively in the society pages. Society columnist Madame X of the *Tribune* noted:

It is owing to her (Mary Aldis') inspiration that the standard of the plays has been kept up above that usually aimed at by nonprofessional players. There is an earnestness on the part of the actors, a sense of duty to the traditions of their troupe, which makes them study and learn their parts more thoroughly than is the case with others of their ilk.<sup>328</sup>

In the 1912 – 13 season, they performed throughout Chicago: in a fundraiser at Ravinia in September, at Hull-House in January to help the group raise money for their trip to Europe, in March at University of Chicago and in December at the Fine Arts to benefit the suffrage movement.<sup>329</sup> In May 1913, what had been an amateur and ad-hoc group formally organized themselves as the Lake Forest Players.<sup>330</sup> They developed enough of a group identity and following that the Play-House continued to operate through the summer of 1913 while the Aldis' were in Europe.

---

<sup>328</sup> Mme. X. "News of the Society World." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Aug. 24, 1913: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 28 June 2016.

<sup>329</sup> "Display Ad 11 – No title." *Chicago Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Mar. 15, 1913: 12. *ProQuest*. Web 28 June 2016; Mme. X. "News of the Society World." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Nov. 30, 1913: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 28 June 2016

<sup>330</sup> "Society and Entertainments." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* May 8, 1913: 13. *ProQuest*. Web. 28 June 2016.

The Players were invited to perform at the Boston Toy Theatre in December 1913, giving two evenings of one-acts for Boston audiences: *Mrs. Pat and the Law* by Mary Aldis, *Tradition* by George Middleton, Strindberg's *The Stronger*, *By-Products* by Joseph Medill Patterson and Mrs. Horace Martin's *The Bishop's Comedy*.<sup>331</sup> The Boston critic praised their acting, which is particularly impressive given that Mary Aldis once admitted that the group worked without a director, relying instead on "mutual suggestion and recrimination."<sup>332</sup> Despite their lack of training and formality, they were praised by Boston critics for their "simplicity, directness, and sincerity."<sup>333</sup> Their material received less praise: Mrs. Aldis' play was "loose, meandering, and actionless" and Patterson's *By-Products* is described as "Galsworthyian." The Lake Forest Players were judged to be worthy, earnest amateur "uplifters."<sup>334</sup>

Boston was the group's only "tour;" following this engagement they limited their performances to The Play-House in the summer. Kimbrel notes that some of the women's husbands objected to their wives becoming "professionals."<sup>335</sup> The Lake Forest Players produced through the summer of 1917, and their seasons were noted by *Theatre Arts Magazine*, the journal of the Little Theatre movement. In 1919, *Theatre Arts* reported that the war had closed the theatre. Mary Aldis is quoted;

---

<sup>331</sup> "Lake Forest Players Welcomed in Boston." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec. 20, 1913: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 28 June 2016. "Missouri Facing Rail Rate Snarl." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec. 21, 1913: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 28 June 2016.

<sup>332</sup> Kimbrel n. pag.

<sup>333</sup> "The Lake Forest Players in Boston." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec. 28, 1913: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 28 June 2016.

<sup>334</sup> "The Lake Forest Players in Boston." *Chicago Daily Tribune* 1.

<sup>335</sup> Kimbrel n. pag.



The little group of players who used to play together were dispersed by the war, some in active service, some in other parts of the country, and some so busy at home with war work that it was not possible to give plays. Last summer, as there was a crying need for small houses, owing to the number of officers at the Great Lakes Training Station and Fort Sheridan, I fitted up the Playhouse as a dwelling, for which purpose it is now being used.<sup>336</sup>

Following the war, the theatre was only sporadically used. Arthur and Mary's son Graham attended Harvard, and brought home plays from George Pierce Baker's 47 Workshop to produce. The final show was said to have taken place in 1920.<sup>337</sup> In 1928, Graham and his family moved into the main house on the estate and Arthur and Mary moved into the remodeled Play-House. Arthur died in 1933, and Mary in 1949. Graham Aldis continued his parent's tradition of directly supporting the arts by renting the various cottages and apartments on the property to artists, making it into something of an artist's colony. Graham and his wife both died in 1966, the estate was sold to the city of Lake Forest and torn down. It is now the site of a public park.<sup>338</sup>

With regards to the dispositions of Off-Loop theatre, the Aldis' Play-House and the Lake Forest Players were one of the earliest signs of the emergence of a home-grown theatre scene in Chicago. Although the idea of an amateur theatre company of society people presenting plays on a private estate may seem the antithesis of Off-Loop theatre, the Lake Forest Players were an integral part of the emerging art theatre community in Chicago, and the first that was entirely local. The better-known art theatre efforts were led by newcomers to Chicago –

---

<sup>336</sup> "The Theatre Arts Chronicle." *Theatre Arts* July 1919: 215. Print. 215.

<sup>337</sup> Kimbrel n. pag.

<sup>338</sup> Kimbrel n. pag.

Robertson was a Scottish immigrant originally based in New York City, Maurice Browne was an Englishman who came to Chicago because of his wife, the New Theatre's Victor Mapes was a New Yorker hired in as well. The Lake Forest Players were unique in that they were entirely indigenous to Chicago (or Lake Forest), presenting plays by and for their community. The group interacted with and supported other art theatre groups within the scene – hosting Hull-House players and in turn performing a benefit for them. The Lake Forest Players were a private theatre only insofar as their Playhouse was located on private property. The group would today be considered a community theatre, but in 1911, the divisions between amateur, art, and community theatre were not clearly established. They were amateurs interested in art theatre, and their work, in terms of both writing and performance, was considered in many cases to be equivalent to that of the Little Theatre and the Donald Robertson Players.<sup>339</sup> Maurice Browne included the Play-House alongside the Little Theatre and Hull-House Players as proof that Chicago's art theatre scene was more advanced than that of any other city in his 1914 essay *The Temple of a Living Art*.<sup>340</sup>

Further, like the Little Theatre, the Aldis' Play-House served as a locus of community and an arena of exchange; they hosted performances by other little theatre groups at the estate, further strengthening the bonds within the theatre community. This community was essentially an alliance between the high-minded, high society theatrical uplifters of the North

---

<sup>339</sup> The theatre critics are the final arbiters: the Little Theatre and Donald Robertson's companies were reviewed in the press; the Lake Forest Players were not. Since their productions were not open to the general public, newspaper critics likely saw no point in covering it. However, Browne and other members of the art theatre community included the efforts of the Lake Forest alongside their own work, rather than as separate from it.

<sup>340</sup> Browne, Maurice. "Temple of a Living Art, a Plea for an American Art Theatre." *Drama* 12 (1911): 160-178. Print. 161.

Shore and the bohemian writers and artists of the South and West sides. Maurice Browne's Little Theatre, specifically its tea room and speakers series, brought the two groups together in a central location. The Lake Forest Players, constituted of society folk, were the North Shore anchors of this; and the Players' Workshop, located in the bohemian enclave at 57<sup>th</sup> St., included more practicing artists and anchored the South Side. The fact that multiple companies existed simultaneously and non-competitively, that writers and performers moved between the groups with ease, as Alice Gerstenberg, Kenneth Sawyer Goodman, and Mary Aldis clearly did – bespeak a community of likeminded individuals from varied backgrounds coming together in common cause, which is one of the dispositions of Off-Loop theatre. These dispositions – of community, of locality, of collegiality - prefigure the advent of Off-Loop theatre, and directly contributed to the habitus to come.

### **The Players' Workshop and The Philistine Theatre**

The Players' Workshop, as previously mentioned, was housed in the 57<sup>th</sup> St. Bohemian colony on the city's South Side, near the University of Chicago campus. This was an experimental theatre group that focused on plays written by Chicago playwrights, and operated on a somewhat less-formal basis than the Little Theatre or Robertson's groups. The Workshop began producing in June 1916, and a listing of company members reveals several people Dukore names as ensemble members of the Little Theatre, including Alice Gerstenberg, Arthur Johnson, and Shelley Neltner.<sup>341</sup> Dukore names these three as the leaders of the Little Theatre

---

<sup>341</sup>Gerstenberg, Alice. "The Players' Workshop of Chicago." *The Theatre Magazine*: Sept. 1917: 142; "News of Chicago Society." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Aug. 20, 1916: 3. ProQuest. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.

“player’s revolt” in 1913, which challenged Maurice Browne’s leadership.<sup>342</sup> Based on this fact, the Players’ Workshop may have been a direct result of the defection by Little Theatre members, although this cannot be stated conclusively. At the very least, the existence of the Players’ Workshop speaks to the vitality of the art theatre community in Chicago at the time – the city was capable of supporting two alternative theatres. Finally, it can be pointed to as an early example of a key disposition of the Off-Loop habitus - when in doubt, start your own theatre company.

In an article recounting the group’s first year that appeared in *The Theatre Magazine*, Alice Gerstenberg writes that “Elizabeth Bingham, who turned her studio into a theatre laboratory, is the pivot around which these various elements rotate.”<sup>343</sup> It is unclear who founded the group, or if it had a specific artistic director, although Bingham is named in several sources. Lou Wall Moore, Ben Hecht, and Maxwell Bodenheim are mentioned elsewhere as being founders of the company, but it appears that the Workshop operated as a collective. In her *Theatre Magazine* article, Gerstenberg describes the group as having one hundred members, “players and playwrights, amateur or professional, desiring to experiment, scenic artists wanting to experiment, and the associate members are friends to the cause...”<sup>344</sup> Much of their support seems to have come from the social elite: the Players’ Workshop generally received coverage in the society column rather than theatre reviews. Members paid a \$5 initiation and \$1.00 per month dues, which entitled them to two seats at every monthly bill. Plays ran for one week each month. In *The Insurgent Theatre*, Dickinson lists approximately

---

<sup>342</sup> Dukore 13.

<sup>343</sup> Gerstenberg 142.

<sup>344</sup> Gerstenberg 142.

twenty-eight plays produced in the group's first season, including several by Goodman, Ben Hecht (writing together and separately) and Gerstenberg.<sup>345</sup> He described the group as: "... a laboratory organization which has done excellent work in the production of new plays, the enlisting of players and writers and audience in that city. Though only a year old this organization has already achieved some notable results."<sup>346</sup> Stuart Hecht describes the company as specializing in "imaginative if rough-hewn productions of new plays by Chicago dramatists."<sup>347</sup> Members included "society" writers like Alice Gerstenberg and Mary Aldis, and members of Chicago's bohemian literary community such as Maxwell Bodenheim and Ben Hecht.

The Players' Workshop was a place to experiment.<sup>348</sup> It was a membership-based organization, and did not seek a popular audience – although it often attracted an upper-class audience due to its membership. In *Theatre Magazine*, Gerstenberg stated, "It is easy to understand why the workshop should appeal to writers and players and artists in need of a place in which to experiment but not quite so obvious the interest that a certain portion of the public takes in paying for the entrance privilege of being 'tried out upon.'"<sup>349</sup> Her article ends by saying that the group would be starting a second branch, on the city's north side, to be directed by Elisha Cook.<sup>350</sup>

---

<sup>345</sup> Dickinson 242.

<sup>346</sup> Dickinson 116.

<sup>347</sup> Hecht, "Kenneth Sawyer Goodman" 140.

<sup>348</sup> Hecht, "The Plays of Alice Gerstenberg" 5.

<sup>349</sup> Gerstenberg 142.

<sup>350</sup> Cook was the father of character actor Elisha Cook, Jr.

The group seemed to fracture after their initial season. In August 1917, *Theatre Arts* reported that the Players' Workshop would not reopen next season, but that several members had leased the now defunct Chicago Little Theatre's space in the Fine Arts Building and would continue to produce under the name "The Playshop."<sup>351</sup> In December, the magazine announced that the group was now called the Philistine Theatre, and was being directed by Elisha and Helen Cook. Also in the December 1917 issue of *Theatre Arts*, it is announced that the Players' Workshop *would* continue, "under a changed policy and with new officers." Frederick Bruegger, a musician and playwright, would be director, and J. Blanding Sloan and Charles P. Larsen would be art directors. In a significant change, the theatre would no longer focus exclusively on Chicago playwrights.<sup>352</sup> The Board of Education had offered the use of a school building on E. 54<sup>th</sup> St. which was being renovated to house a theatre, studios and rehearsal spaces.<sup>353</sup> The group would train high school students to serve as understudies for the regular cast. This idea – of converting an existing space into an art center for a community – foretells the purposes of the original Body Politic, as a community art center, and also echoes the "theatrical community center" designation created by the city of Chicago in order to accommodate storefront theatres within the building code in 1973.

The Players' Workshop moved to the 54<sup>th</sup> St. school after April of 1917; they began offering shows in January 1918, and operated until at least June 1918. In February, they

---

<sup>351</sup> "At the Little Theatres." *Theatre Arts* Aug. 1917: 199. Print. 199.

<sup>352</sup> "At the Little and Experimental Theatres, 1918." *Theatre Arts* Dec. 1917: 60. Print. 60.

<sup>353</sup> Currey, Margery. "Schools to Back Real Community Theater Here." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Oct. 21, 1917: A7. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 June 2016.

presented *Unawakened* by Mary Aldis, a play about “the food conservation question.”<sup>354</sup> Their June show *S!O!S! – Smile! O! Smile!* by Bruegger was postponed until August, and it is unclear if it was ever performed.<sup>355</sup> The company may have closed at this point. The Philistine Theatre opened in October 1917. *Tribune* critic Percy Hammond wrote, “Its title, ‘The Philistine,’ is said to be symbolic of its intention to entertain the dramatic middle class with sane, simple, and appealing items from a copious repertory of one actors.”<sup>356</sup> The October 1917 issue of *Theatre Arts* reported that the Philistine Theatre at the Fine Arts Building produced an evening of four one-acts including work by Chicago playwrights Kenneth Sawyer Goodman, Ben Hecht, and Florence Kiper Frank which ran for two weeks.<sup>357</sup> The February 1918 issue of *Theatre Arts* reported that the Philistine produced shows in February and March.<sup>358</sup> Of the two, the Philistine Theatre seemed to adhere more closely to the original mission of being a workshop for playwrights, while the Players’ Workshop seemed to evolve into a community theatre and training program when it moved to 54<sup>th</sup> St. Neither group survived the changes that came about due to American involvement in World War I.

Although it was short-lived, the existence of the Players’ Workshop(s) and the Philistine Theatre are themselves evidence of the development of a sense of community among art theatre practitioners and enthusiasts, and the fact that the group could divide and multiply

---

<sup>354</sup> “Thrillers and Food Comedy Delight at Players' Workshop.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb. 27, 1918: 15. ProQuest. Web. 27 June 2016.

<sup>355</sup> Cinderella. “Society and Entertainments.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* June 28, 1918: 11. ProQuest. Web. 27 June 2016.

<sup>356</sup> Hammond, Percy. “News and Views of the Theaters.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Oct. 7, 1917: C1. ProQuest. Web. 27 June 2016.

<sup>357</sup> “At the Little and Experimental Theatres 1918.” *Theatre Arts* Dec. 1917: 56. Print. 56.

<sup>358</sup> “At the Little and Experimental Theatres, 1918.” *Theatre Arts*; “At the Little and Experimental Theatres, 1918.” *Theatre Arts* Feb. 1918: 111. Print. 111.

speaks to the strength and growth of the alternative theatre community at the time. In regards to habitus, the fact that a sense of community was once extant, created the disposition to have such a thing once again. Further, the ability of the groups to splinter and survive speaks to the cohesion and vitality of the scene at the time. The art theatre scene in Chicago faded out due to world events, rather than local apathy. It is also interesting to note that the art theatre community was a space in which the social elite, “bohemians”, and poor and lower-class immigrants interacted, democratizing the city’s theatre scene.

### **The B. Iden Payne Company and the Chicago Theatre Society**

The Chicago Theatre Society sponsored a repertory company headed by B. Iden Payne during the 1913-14 season at the Fine Arts Building. The Society had supported Donald Robertson’s Drama Players in 1911-12. The following season, the Society opted to present several companies rather than produce one: in 1912 -13, brought the Coburn Players, the Hull-House Players, Winthrop Ames’s Little Theatre of New York, the Irish Players, and Miss Horniman’s Players from Manchester to Chicago for engagements varying from one to four weeks.<sup>359</sup> For the 1913-14 season, the Society again decided to sponsor a repertory company, albeit on a smaller scale than the Drama Players. The Society approached Miss Horniman regarding a residency: although she was not interested, she recommended B. Iden Payne.<sup>360</sup>

Payne had been a director at the Abbey Theatre for one season before becoming the director of Miss Horniman’s Players.<sup>361</sup> Payne was with Miss Horniman’s company from its

---

<sup>359</sup> Goodman 308.

<sup>360</sup> Payne, B. Iden. *A Life in A Wooden O: Memoirs Of The Theatre*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1977. Print. 116.

<sup>361</sup> Miss Horniman had subsidized the Irish Players during their first season, with the understanding that English directors be employed. Unbeknownst to Payne, he was one of the English directors hired to fulfill this requirement.



founding in 1907 until 1912, leaving the company briefly in 1911 to mount a series of George Bernard Shaw plays on his own.<sup>362</sup> Payne accepted the Theatre Society's offer to stage an 8-week season of repertory art theatre in Chicago, and assembled a company of actors, which included his wife, Mona Limerick, as well as Walter Hampden and Whitford Kane.

Given the track record of high-profile art theatre efforts in Chicago to this point, the company was relatively successful and well-received, but also unremarkable. Payne either independently or at the urging of the Society's secretary Hamlin Garland, had hoped to produce plays by American playwrights, but struggled to find work of suitable quality.<sup>363</sup> He may have faced the same struggle with Garland that Donald Robertson encountered; Garland had insisted upon the inclusion of American writers in the Drama Players season, and had been proven wrong. Payne released details of his intended season in September and October of 1913: it included Strindberg, Shaw, and Manchester playwrights Stanley Houghton and Harold Brighouse.<sup>364</sup> Perhaps coincidentally, Garland announced his resignation from the Theatre Society in October 1913.<sup>365</sup> Payne eventually found four suitable American plays; of these, Kenneth Sawyer Goodman's *The Game of Chess* proved to be a highlight of the season.<sup>366</sup>

The plays presented received generally favorable reviews, although *Tribune* critic Percy Hammond, in a review of *Dolly Reforming Herself*, cites a lack of ensemble: "It seems that the

---

<sup>362</sup> Shattuck, Charles H. "Memoirs of B. Iden Payne." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29 (1978): 304–8. Print; "News of the Theatres." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Sept. 24, 1913: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 June 2016.

<sup>363</sup> Payne 117.

<sup>364</sup> Hammond, Percy. "Arrival of 'Damaged Goods' and Other Events of the Week." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Sept. 28, 1913: B1. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.

<sup>365</sup> Hammond, Percy. "News of the Theatres." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Oct. 15, 1913: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.

<sup>366</sup> Hammond, Percy. "The Theatre Society Surveys Its Season's Repertory Adventures." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (1872 – 1922) Feb. 22, 1914: G1. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.

chief flaw in the performance at the Fine Arts is a failure on the part of the players to blend, to be intimate one with another. Their speeches and movements fall separately, good enough in themselves but having no connection, save in their context.”<sup>367</sup> The company had only three weeks to rehearse together prior to opening their season, which may explain the lack of ensemble. In the end, the company lost \$10,000 on their season; considering that the Drama Players had lost several times that amount two years earlier, it was accounted a moderate success. *Tribune* critic Percy Hammond, in a season-end summary of the company, stated that the plays were generally well-selected and well-done, and the members of the Theatre Society had largely refrained from interfering in Payne’s work. The season had also avoided the aura of pedantry and superiority that had colored the Society’s previous efforts. Although Hammond still looked derisively upon the uplift movement in general, and characterized the activities of the Chicago Theatre Society as rich men attempting to foist their tastes onto an unwilling public, he admitted that Payne had done an admirable job. “Mr. Payne’s ministrations have been tonic and entertaining more than they have been otherwise, and with the advantage of his experiences this season his return will be a pleasant prospect.”<sup>368</sup>

Following the close of their Chicago season, the Drama League sponsored a tour of their production of *Measure for Measure*. At the end of the tour in March, the company disbanded.<sup>369</sup> The single season of the Payne Company in Chicago proved to be a minor event in Payne’s career, but an important one in that it set off a chain of events that are relevant to

---

<sup>367</sup> Hammond, Percy. “‘Dolly Reforming Herself’ at the Fine Arts Theater.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Dec. 26, 1913: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.

<sup>368</sup> Hammond, “The Theatre Society Surveys Its Season.”

<sup>369</sup> Hammond, Percy. “News of the Theatres.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872 – 1922) Mar. 5, 1914: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.

the dispositions related to the habitus of Off-Loop theatre: the opportunity to direct his own repertory company brought Payne to the United States, where he befriended Kenneth Sawyer Goodman. Goodman introduced Payne to Thomas Wood Stevens of the Art Institute. Stevens would later hire Payne to teach in the theatre training program he founded at Carnegie Mellon, thus launching Payne's long career in academia.<sup>370</sup> For Goodman, the Payne Company was significant because Goodman received feedback on his writing from Payne, and saw his work produced professionally for the first time.<sup>371</sup> For the Chicago Theatre Society, the B. Iden Payne Company would be their last foray into "uplift." Goodman, writing on behalf of the Society, summarized the organization's three years of activities for *The Nation* magazine in March of 1914. He admits that the mission of elevating public taste had met with limited success:

The season at the Lyric, the engagements of the Irish Players and of Miss Horniman's Players, and more especially the twelve weeks just closed, have tested the present attitude of the public and of the critics towards the repertory idea. There is no indication that this attitude is likely to undergo a radical change. For it is rash to assume that the public can be consciously educated in the theatre. What can be done is to offer to those people who are already genuinely interested in plays and methods of presentation not yet commonly found in other theatres a chance to gratify their taste. If such a policy is followed, without a truckling to sensationalism or a leaning to moonshine, and above all without any assumptions of cultural superiority towards those who are frankly

---

<sup>370</sup> Payne 120.

<sup>371</sup> Hecht, "Kenneth Sawyer Goodman" 139.

more interested by some other form of entertainment, it is safe to count upon an already existent portion of the public which (I quote here a letter of Mr. Winthrop Ames), “can be slowly unified into a supporting and increasing audience.”<sup>372</sup>

Goodman’s article seems to summarize the lessons learned by the early art theatre pioneers in the city: that an audience for art theatre exist, but must be fostered and developed; that art theatre does not and cannot compete directly with commercial theatre, and the attitude of “cultural superiority” present in earlier efforts – such as the New Theatre – were detrimental. This lesson seemed to carry forward and became a disposition of Off-Loop theatre, which in many ways actively maintains a populist, blue-collar identity, and actively avoids any association with the effete and intellectual.

## **Conclusion**

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the B. Iden Payne Company to the habitus of Off-Loop theatre was the presentation of Goodman’s one-act as a curtain-raiser – which showed that Chicago audiences wanted to support local talent. Chicago’s early-century art theatre/little theatre community established that an audience existed for non-commercial, alternative theatre. It was small, but also wealthy, educated, and willing to offer support. Anna Morgan is largely responsible for creating this audience. Further, the early-century efforts showed that this type of theatre could not survive on box office alone, and required subscription, endowment, institutional or public support; the New Theatre, Donald Robertson’s efforts, and

---

<sup>372</sup> Goodman 308.

the Chicago Little Theatre all provide valuable lessons in how *not* to manage an arts organization. Morgan, Laura Dainty Pelham at Hull-House, Donald Robertson's companies, the Chicago Little Theatre, and the Players' Workshop all demonstrated that Chicago had native talent in terms of actors, directors, designers, and writers, but this talent needed opportunities for training, development, and exposure befitting a city of Chicago's size and prominence.

World War I altered the landscape of the local theatre scene: many of the companies closed, Kenneth Sawyer Goodman died, and many of the artists and writers involved in the scene moved on to New York City and beyond. However, as the next chapter will show, for those who remained – like Alice Gerstenberg; for those who returned, like Thomas Wood Stevens; and those who came after, like Minnie Galatzer, the energies of Chicago's non-profit, non-commercial theatre community in the years between the wars would be channeled into developing local talent by fostering local playwrights, directors, and actor training, as well as using performance in service to social issues and causes, such as the Federal Theatre Project and the theatre programs at Hull-House.

Czechowski characterizes the early art theatre scene as a matter of incremental growth, stating that while none of the individual companies long enough to achieve much, when considered as a "movement" viewed from the New Theatre to the Chicago Little Theatre (and I would include the work of Anna Morgan and Hull-House in this as well), a progressive pattern emerges of one company building upon the accomplishments of its predecessors.<sup>373</sup> In other words, everyone learned from everyone else's mistakes and successes, and built upon them.

---

<sup>373</sup> Czechowski 179.

This is how habitus works: agents base their expectations and choices on what they observe – this process was already under way. While Czechowski characterizes the art theatre/little theatre scene at the beginning of the century as a progression unto itself, it is the beginning of something larger – the habitus for Off-Loop theatre.

In this era, we already see the value placed on community emerging. The New Theatre was based on forging a local identity on a national scale: Chicago would beat New York City to an endowed theatre. Hull-House Theatre began with the idea of offering an alternative to popular theatre for a local, neighborhood audience. Additionally, Hull-House used actors from the community on the stage. Donald Robertson saw a quality in Chicago that made him want to use the city as the stage for his ideal theatre, and is perhaps one of the first people to move to the city with the intention of starting their own theatre company – as future generations of college graduates would do. Anna Morgan forged an artistic community out of her wealthy students and bohemian colleagues at the Fine Arts Building: this community would produce Alice Gerstenberg and Ellen Van Volkenburg (among others). Van Volkenburg would establish the Chicago Little Theatre with her partner and husband, Maurice Browne, and continue to foster the salon-like atmosphere that became part of Chicago's early-twentieth century literary renaissance. Gerstenberg would join and then leave Van Volkenburg's company to work with a more democratic company, the Players' Workshop, which would schism further in the Philistine. After 1912, a small, vibrant - at times contentious - art theatre community had evolved. All of these groups operated as ensembles. The dispositions toward community and ensemble become set in this era.

Practices which became common to Off-Loop theatre also emerged in this period – such as the idea of converting existing space into a theatre. Taking inspiration from Anna Morgan’s studio, Van Volkenburg and Browne created a “little theatre” inside the Fine Arts Building. The Players’ Workshop and the Aldis family followed suit, turning a former storefront and a guest cottage into performance spaces. The scale of Chicago theatre was also set in this period – as the New Theatre, Donald Robertson, and the Chicago Theatre Society demonstrated, the audience for alternative theatre at the time was limited – doing theatre on a small scale was the only option. The close proximity of audience to performer necessitated a “smaller” style of acting and stagecraft – pioneered at the Chicago Little Theatre. Converting space, appealing to a small but engaged audience, and by these practices reinforcing a sense of intimacy between actors and audience have all become part of the habitus.

### CHAPTER 3: CHICAGO THEATRE BETWEEN THE WARS

The First World War altered Chicago's art theatre/little theatre community. While the war brought about the end of several key institutions of the art theatre movement, such as the Chicago Little Theatre, the Players' Workshop, and the Philistine, individual artists continued to work: Alice Gerstenberg, Thomas Wood Stevens, and Donald Robertson continued their activities during and after the war. Kenneth Sawyer Goodman's death in the 1918 influenza epidemic led to the creation of the Goodman Memorial Theatre at the Art Institute, which Thomas Wood Stevens would be instrumental in establishing. Stevens would also head Chicago's Federal Theatre Project for a time. Gerstenberg and Robertson both worked to institutionalize art theatre ideals: Robertson at the civic and municipal level, and Gerstenberg on a more social level through her involvement with women's clubs. The Federal Theatre Project kept professional theatre alive in Chicago as it did everywhere, and helped bring a more socially conscious sensibility to the city's theatre scene. Through all of this, theatrical activities at Hull-House continued apace. Newell notes that although the war and economic changes that followed had an impact, the art theatre/little theatre movement had an impact, ". . . yet the seed had been implanted and its future growth was assured because of continued community support and the creative efforts of a growing number of university graduates turned out annually by an increasing number of drama departments."<sup>374</sup> It is fair to say that the focus of non-commercial theatre efforts in Chicago shifted from experimental to developmental.

---

<sup>374</sup> Newell, James S. "A Critical Analysis of The Development and Growth of the Kenneth Sawyer Goodman Memorial Theatre and School of Drama, Chicago, Illinois, 1925-1971." Diss. Wayne State, 1973. Print. 32.



The “uplifters” who had focused their efforts on developing an audience for the new drama, put their energies into developing artists – training actors and playwrights, as we see with the work of Alice Gerstenberg, Minnie Galatzer, and Thomas Wood Stevens at the Goodman Memorial Theatre. There appears to have been less of a sense of community among the various groups and individuals active in this period; there seems to be little connection between the groups in question and less crossover of individuals than in the earlier period, as the focus turns towards developing and maintaining institutions – the Goodman Memorial Theatre, the Federal Theatre Project, Robertson’s proposed Civic Theatre. Although the efforts of non-commercial, non-profit theatres were disconnected from one another, on the positive side, the field itself became more democratic. Whereas the pre-War theatre community had been dominated by the wealthy: i.e. Alice Gerstenberg, Kenneth Sawyer Goodman, and Arthur and Mary Aldis; following the war the working classes and minorities gained more influence, as will be seen through the Federal Theatre Project, Hull-House, and Minnie Galatzer’s efforts. There was a progression towards professionalization and institutionalization: training programs develop and become formalized, and the leading non-commercial theatre efforts of this era used theatre in the service of a larger social mission, i.e. Hull-House and the Federal Theatre Project. The terminology used to discuss non-commercial, non-profit theatre also shifts: prior to World War I, the terms “art theatre,” “little theatre,” or “uplift movement” were deployed to describe this theatre community; “non-commercial,” “subprofessional” and “community theatre” become more common in this period. Robertson and others also used “civic theatre” and “municipal theatre” to describe plans for a professional repertory company supported by

public money, similar to the way a public library operates. Robertson championed this idea in the 1920s, but it never came to fruition.

The changes in the non-commercial theatre community reflect the changes in the city. Chicago had become a manufacturing center and continued to grow in population, but prohibition gave rise to the city's notorious gangster culture. Later in the era, the depression hit Chicago particularly hard due to rampant corruption within city government during the administrations of Mayor "Big Bill" Thompson (1915 – 1923 and 1927 – 1931). In *Staging the People: Community and Identity in the Federal Theatre Project*, Elizabeth Osborne notes:

Consistently under suspicion for various misdeeds ranging from taking kickbacks and bribes to defrauding the city, Thompson's tenure as mayor led to tax strikes, an explosion of organized crime, and a series of vicious court cases. While the national unemployment average hovered around 25 percent, by May of 1932 Chicago's unemployment rate swelled to 40 percent, and more unemployed workers arrived in the city every day. By the end of 1932, Chicago was bankrupt.<sup>375</sup>

Thompson was defeated by Anton Cermak in 1931. Cermak was killed in an assassination attempt on President Roosevelt in 1933, and was succeeded by Ed Kelly as interim mayor. Kelly was also corrupt, but between the income generated by the 1933 Century of Progress and his

---

<sup>375</sup> Osborne, Elizabeth A. *Staging the People: Community and Identity in the Federal Theatre Project*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print. 19.

willingness to work with the Roosevelt administration to get emergency relief funds, he managed to clean up many of the messes left behind by Thompson.<sup>376</sup>

## **Hull-House Theatre**

The era between the wars was a transitional time for Hull-House, both as an institution, and in terms of its theatre programs. As the mission of the settlement shifted in response to both the depression and new developments in the field of social work, Hull-House's theatre program transitioned from being an elite performance group within the settlement to a more democratic and community-minded project. Sadly, Hull-House's new institutional mission came into conflict with the long-standing ethos of the theatre program, bringing it to an abrupt end in the early 1940s. However, in this period Hull-House contributed a more blue-collar, working-class, Chicago-based stage aesthetic to the habitus, and also served as a laboratory for Viola Spolin's groundbreaking work with theatre games and improvisation.

Jane Addams pioneered the concept of social work at Hull-House, but by the 1930s the field was changing. Addams, Ellen Gates Starr, and the original Hull-House residents came from all walks of life, had no special training, and were often motivated by compassion and empathy for the downtrodden. This first generation of settlement workers chose to live among the poor as neighbors, learned by trial and error, and relied on direct experience and practical knowledge to accomplish their social mission. By the 1930s, however, social work had evolved into a profession, rather than a calling. Hecht states;

---

<sup>376</sup> Osborne 19.

This new attitude had little respect for anything other than “social action,” that is, the solving of immediate social problems. Much like a doctor who favors corrective medicine over preventative medicine, the new approach did not share the long-range social philosophy developed by those such as Addams and Ellen Starr. As a result, it discounted the value of dramatics as a social tool, seeing it only as a form of craft activity.<sup>377</sup>

When Addams’ died in 1935, her immediate successor was Adena Miller Rich, a resident for over twenty years.<sup>378</sup> Rich was “an enthusiastic administrator rather than a creative guiding force,” and her tenure can be viewed as an extension of Addams’ leadership. The challenges presented by the depression proved to be too much; Rich resigned in 1937 and was replaced by Charlotte Carr, a member of the “new generation” of social workers.<sup>379</sup> Carr had a background in government social services and relief work, and tended to take a bureaucratic approach to matters.<sup>380</sup> Under Carr’s leadership, Hull-House’s mission and methods came to be more in line with the contemporary view of social work – as one of fixing problems. Theatre held no special place under Carr’s leadership, as it had under Addams.

The Hull-House Players continued following the death of director Laura Dainty Pelham in 1924, but Addams’ death in 1935 brought the group to an end, and signaled a reorganization

---

<sup>377</sup> Hecht diss. 52-3.

<sup>378</sup> "Succeeds Jane Addams." *New York Times (1923-Current file)* Oct. 1, 1935: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

<sup>379</sup> Hecht diss. 55.

<sup>380</sup> "Charlotte Carr Will Head Hull House on Oct. 1." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 16, 1937: 20. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

for the theatre programs.<sup>381</sup> Following the “Player’s Mutiny” of 1915 and resulting purge of the company, the Hull-House Players had continued to do admirable productions of innovative work, presenting three to four plays each year, and giving the Chicago premieres of such plays as Shaw’s *Great Catherine* (1918), William Vaughn Moody’s *The Faith Healer* (1918), and Maxim Gorky’s *The Lower Depths* (1923). After Pelham’s death, Addams assigned the leadership of the company to Maurice J. Cooney. The group stagnated under Cooney; relying on comedies and revivals of earlier work to fill out their three-show season. At Addams’ request, the Players staged a play by either Shaw, Galsworthy, or Lennox Robertson each year, but their play choices were primarily intended to please Addams, rather than speak to a neighborhood audience.<sup>382</sup> Many ensemble members had been with the company since it was founded; they tended to be Irish and West European immigrants. In fact, “. . . few in the company still lived in the neighborhood Hull-House served – nor had they for many years. Like most immigrants, as their economic conditions improved, they sought more prosperous communities in which to live.”<sup>383</sup> Hull-House’s Halsted St. neighborhood in the 1930s was transitioning from primarily Greek and East European immigrants to Southern Blacks and Mexicans.<sup>384</sup> Once symbolic of the Halsted St. neighborhood, the Players no longer represented either the neighborhood or Hull-House itself.

---

<sup>381</sup> "Laura D. Pelham, Social Worker, Dies: Ill 2 Days." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Jan. 23, 1924: 10. ProQuest. Web. 22 May 2018; "Jane Addams of Hull House is Dead." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) May 22, 1935: 1. ProQuest. Web. 22 May 2018.

<sup>382</sup> "Hull House Play." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Mar. 9, 1934: 21. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>383</sup> Hecht diss. 154.

<sup>384</sup> Kinsley, Philip. "Halsted Street is a Prototype of Average Man." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) May 8, 1931: 11. ProQuest. Web. 22 May 2018.

However, the Hull-House Players were just one among several groups and clubs within the settlement that presented plays; while the Hull-House Players grew increasingly less important during the 1930s, theatre activity at Hull-House remained vital.<sup>385</sup> Resident Edith de Nancrede directed several popular youth clubs devoted to performance between 1898 and her death in 1936.<sup>386</sup> While the Hull-House Players no longer attracted a neighborhood audience, de Nancrede's productions were popular, and her students tended to remain connected with Hull-House into adulthood.<sup>387</sup> Her Hull-House Actors Guild was an advanced group that offered a subscription series of plays.<sup>388</sup> In 1933, Maria Astrova Lazareff was added to the Hull-House staff. A former member of the Moscow Art Theatre, she and her husband Ivan Lazareff settled in Chicago and founded a school and theatre company, the Chicago Art Theatre in 1926.<sup>389</sup> Ivan died suddenly in 1929, and by 1933, Maria Lazareff had moved her own dramatic program aimed at young adults to Hull-House, distinct from the Hull-House Players and de Nancrede's efforts.<sup>390</sup>

Addams' immediate successor, Adena Miller Rich, wanted to offer more leisure and recreational activities for the neighborhood in response to the depression.<sup>391</sup> The Hull-House Players were revived, once again under Cooney's direction. In 1936, they presented an

---

<sup>385</sup> Hecht diss. 155.

<sup>386</sup> "Rites for Edith de Nancrede to be Tomorrow." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 1, 1936: 26. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

<sup>387</sup> "Hull House Play." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 5, 1935: 19. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

<sup>388</sup> Hecht diss. 196.

<sup>389</sup> "Art Theater Players to Appear in Winnetka." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec, 10, 1926: 33. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2019.

<sup>390</sup> "Ivan Lazareff of Chicago Art Theater Dies: Director Succumbs to Heart Disease." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 28, 1929: 7. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018; "Plan Auditions at Hull House Little Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 3, 1946: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>391</sup> By, Duncan A. "Chicago's Hull House Copes with Modern Social Problems." *The Washington Post (1923-1954)* Oct. 13, 1935: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, followed by an original dramatization of *Oliver Twist*. The group seemed to get an infusion of new life from some new members and continued. Rich's tenure as head of Hull-House was followed by that of the more bureaucratically-minded Charlotte Carr: in 1939, she consolidated all of Hull-House's dramatic activity under one authority. Prior to this, the numerous clubs, groups, and classes within Hull-House operated independently of one another. The Hull-House Players, de Nancrede's Actors Guild, Lazareff's theatre group, the Children's Theatre, and others were consolidated into one entity called the Hull-House Theatre.<sup>392</sup> The leaders of the individual groups formed a board, under the direction of Jess Ogden, whose official title was head of the Worker's Education Department: theatre activities were now part of the Adult Education department. Hull-House was affiliated with the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which likely accounts for some of this consolidation and bureaucratization.

The new arrangement worked well due to Ogden, whom Hecht characterizes as "inspired and innovative."<sup>393</sup> Under Ogden and the governing board, Hull-House Theatre presented innovative plays for (and with) adults and children; offered classes in speech, playwriting, acting, makeup, stage management, and directing; and continued Addams' idea of using the arts to foster community.<sup>394</sup> Hecht notes, "Ogden believed in the community, and he was convinced of the theatre's ability to create, represent, and affirm community. In this spirit, Ogden developed a dramatic production, *Halsted Street*, which truly reflected Hull-House and

---

<sup>392</sup> Hecht diss. 56 - 7.

<sup>393</sup> Hecht diss. 57.

<sup>394</sup> "Tradition Casts Halo Over Hull House Theatre." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 8, 1940: 1. ProQuest. Web. 22 May 2018.

its surrounding Halsted Street community.”<sup>395</sup> Staged in the spring of 1939, the production united all of the existing drama groups into one production, with a cast of 150. It also used staging techniques popularized by the Federal Theatre Project’s Living Newspapers – a multilevel stage and blackouts, and portrayed the hopes and dreams of the Hull-House neighborhood. It was so successful that a sequel, *Halsted Street II*, was produced the following year.

The consolidation of theatre groups made administrative sense, and the leaders of the individual groups seemed to work together harmoniously; but Carr eventually tried to dictate content and ideology, and this helped bring about the end of the program. Besides being from the new generation of social workers, Carr also had socialist leanings.<sup>396</sup> In 1940, she issued a dictum stating that settlement dramatics should reflect Hull-House’s current ideology of self-improvement, and plays should focus solely on the theme of instructing the neighborhood in this topic. *Halsted St. II*, presented in May 1940, should show “. . . that a neighborhood made up of people anxious to move but unable to do so, must work to improve itself.”<sup>397</sup> Carr’s political leanings may have been less objectionable to Hull-House staff than was her attempt to dictate content and subvert the long-established norms for theatre at the settlement. As Hecht notes, this approach conflicted with Addams’ philosophy of art for self-expression rather than self-analysis. In response to Carr’s decree, most of Hull-House’s theatre staff resigned, others left due to the withdrawal of WPA funds that were paying their salaries. The Hull-House Players

---

<sup>395</sup> Hecht diss. 50.

<sup>396</sup> "Charlotte Carr Resigns as Head of Hull House." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 24, 1942: 12. ProQuest. Web. 22 May 2018.

<sup>397</sup> Hecht diss. 61.



director, Maurice Cooney, resigned in April 1941.<sup>398</sup> No one took over his duties, and so the Players came to an end for a second time. Most of the departed staff were not replaced, and Carr herself resigned in 1943 over issues of budget, mission, and her politics.<sup>399</sup>

Although the pioneering Hull-House Players seemed to spend the period between the wars slowly fading away, the settlement maintained an active and vital training program that provided arts education to several generations of city children. By providing both a home and facilities for Maria Lazareff's acting program, it helped to anchor Stanislavski technique in the city. Hull-House also gave birth to one of Chicago's most significant contribution to modern theatre – improvisation. Viola Spolin was able to develop her theatre games while studying with Neva Boyd at the Recreational Training School.<sup>400</sup> Boyd's school was housed at Hull-House and was intended to train people to direct recreational activities in schools and social centers, and emphasized folk games, dramatics, and child's play as a path to socialization.<sup>401</sup> Spolin studied under Boyd in the mid-1920s, and then went on to work with Hull-House Children's Theatre as a WPA employee in the 1930s.<sup>402</sup>

Apart from the brief flowering under Jess Ogden's leadership, Hull-House's theatre programs in this period are not marked by innovation or artistic excellence, as they had been under Laura Dainty Pelham. Rather, what is important about Hull-House's theatre with regard to the habitus of Off-Loop theatre is that traditions and values of the art theatre/little theatre

---

<sup>398</sup> Hecht diss. 157.

<sup>399</sup> "Charlotte Carr Resigns as Head of Hull House."

<sup>400</sup> Hecht diss. 179. Boyd's school opened in 1920 and operated independently of Hull-House: Jane Addams was on the board of Boyd's school and offered them the use of Hull-House facilities.

<sup>401</sup> "Tea for Prof. Neva Boyd." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Feb. 8, 1941: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

<sup>402</sup> Hecht diss. 181.

movement, as well as values particular to the Hull-House settlement – those of inclusion, collegiality, and a community-focus - were maintained and carried forward and became part of the habitus for the larger theatre community. By continuing the traditions and approaches pioneered by Addams and Pelham: the idea of theatre for and by a specific community (which the Players had lost in the 1920s, but which was reinforced by de Nancrede and other groups at Hull-House); the concept of theatre as an ensemble effort; that the arts are both democratic and democratizing; the theatre activities at Hull-House helped ingrain these values in generations of Hull-House community members and audiences, and these dispositions transferred to the larger community. In particular, the play *Halsted Street* – in depicting and celebrating its own Chicago community, begins a tradition of putting a particular type of “Chicago-ness” on the stage: one that is urban, immigrant, blue-collar, working-class, and hometown-proud. This aesthetic thread of depicting the city and its citizens in such a way perhaps finds its greatest expression in the realm of improvisational comedy (i.e., “Give me a location?” “The el!” . . . and we’re in Chicago), David Mamet’s early plays, and culminates in the ultimate stage expression of Chicago: the Organic Theatre’s 1977 *Bleacher Bums*, depicting Cubs fans watching a game.

Hull-House Theatre in this period also reinforced a rebellious quality that has also come to be part of the habitus. Addams’ ideal of theatre for self-expression was so much a part of the value structure of the Hull-House theatre community that staff members were willing to quit their jobs when they saw this value challenged and undermined by Carr’s 1940 dictum. The ghosts of earlier theatre revolts haunt this incident, such as the one Pelham quashed among the Players in 1915, the schism at the Little Theatre that gave rise to the Players Workshop in

1916, and the events surrounding the ousting of Thomas Wood Stevens from the Goodman Memorial Theatre in 1929, which will be covered later in this section. This propensity to speak out, break ranks, and revolt in the name of a higher principle has become part of the disposition of Off-Loop theatre. This sense of iconoclasm and opposition comes down to the present in the form of what Gary Houston called “a vital arrogance,” a quality young Off-Loop theatre companies need to have in order to challenge the old order.<sup>403</sup>

### **Alice Gerstenberg**

Alice Gerstenberg may have been the first to lead a revolt within an ensemble that resulted in the formation of another ensemble. Her stage training began at Anna Morgan’s studio, she was part of the first ensemble at Maurice Browne and Ellen Van Volkenburg’s Chicago Little Theatre, then led the uprising that gave rise to Players’ Workshop. She became a significant figure in creating and fostering Chicago’s non-commercial theatre scene throughout the twentieth century. She was primarily known as a playwright, but also acted, directed, and produced on occasion. Her greatest contribution to the dispositions and habitus of Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre was her ability to organize theatre groups, foster the development of amateur talent, and her emphasis on doing so by and for the city of Chicago. She was a member of Chicago’s social elite who used her wealth and social connections to further the cause of the little theatre movement. Despite her active and prominent role in the development of Chicago’s theatre scene, her contributions are frequently dismissed or overlooked by theatre

---

<sup>403</sup> Houston, Gary. “A Vital Arrogance.” *Resetting The Stage: Theater Beyond The Loop, 1960-1990*. Chicago: Chicago Public Library, 1990. 16 – 22. Print. 18.

historians; in *Composing Ourselves: The Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience*, Dorothy Chansky notes;

Her work and what could be called her lifestyle ceased to fit standard progressive, modernist, or revisionist paradigms for theatre and literature. Yet both her plays and her investment in community embodied the concerns for fellowship, self-expression, and anticommercialism that Little Theatre fought for.<sup>404</sup>

Gerstenberg was born in 1885, the only child of one of Chicago's most prominent families: her grandfather, Charles Gerstenberg, was a founder of the Chicago Board of Trade, a position inherited by her father, Erich.<sup>405</sup> Her mother Julia was a leading patron of the arts, an active club member, and involved in the women's suffrage movement.<sup>406</sup> Alice was something of a rarity in the Chicago society of her time – a third-generation Chicagoan. Her deep roots in the city would become a defining characteristic of her career. Gerstenberg graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1907, and returned home to Chicago, where she began to study at Anna Morgan's studio. In February 1908, she appeared in a production at Morgan's studio written by Dorothy Martyn, a fellow Chicago "society girl" with playwrighting aspirations.<sup>407</sup> The next month, March 1908, Morgan's studio presented two of Gerstenberg's one-act plays, *A Little*

---

<sup>404</sup> Chansky, Dorothy. *Composing Ourselves: the Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004. Print. 165.

<sup>405</sup> Obituary 1 – No Title. *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923 – 1963)* Nov. 4, 1940: 22. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.

<sup>406</sup> Obituary 3 – No Title. *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923 – 1963)* Oct. 13, 1938: 18. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.

<sup>407</sup> "Society Bud a Playwright: Two Sketches by Miss Dorothy Martyn." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Feb. 9, 1908: 3. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

*World* and *Captain Joe*, both about life at a women's college, to acclaim.<sup>408</sup> In July 1908, Gerstenberg was interviewed for a society-page article based on the premise that "Amateur theatricals in the hands of Chicago girls have lost much of the reputation for inane which formerly characterized them." In it, Gerstenberg admits to a lifelong fascination with both theatre and writing, confiding to her interviewer: "I have never cared about writing stories excepting as I could turn them into plays. I have always been crazy about the theater. I remember when I was a little, little girl, I would dress my dolls up and make them go through 'stunts' that I had seen at some playhouse or other."<sup>409</sup>

One might expect Gerstenberg to have experienced familial resistance to her involvement in theatre, or pressure to conform to the usual path of "society girls" and focus on marriage, but her parents were supportive of their daughter and her work throughout her life. Gerstenberg seemed to live as comfortably in the world of debutantes, woman's club luncheons, and charity galas that constituted the social world of Chicago's elite as she did in the world of the little theatre movement, writing and directing plays. Gerstenberg used her social position to advance her career as a playwright and further the greater cause of art theatre. Chansky observes that much of Gerstenberg's life seems to resist "standard progressive, modernist, or revisionist paradigms." Particularly early in her career she is often depicted as a dreamy society girl writing plays about her small social world, but Gerstenberg was ambitious and outspoken when it came to her career as a playwright.

---

<sup>408</sup> "Give College Girl's Plays: Bryn Mawr Graduates Present Miss...." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Mar. 13, 1908: 3. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>409</sup> "Have Won Success on the Amateur Stage: Miss..." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872 – 1922) July 12, 1908: F6. *ProQuest* Web. 21 May 2018.

Gerstenberg was already known as a professional playwright – at least in Chicago’s social circles - prior to her society debut in December 1908.<sup>410</sup> The first of her many theatrical organizing efforts began in February 1909 with the Junior Dramatic Troupe of the Chicago Woman’s Athletic Club. She was supposed to direct *Pygmalion and Galatea*, but in April it was announced that due to a death in the family of two cast members, the scheduled performance had been changed to Gerstenberg’s one-act *The Class Play*, in which she would also appear.<sup>411</sup> Accompanied by her mother, she spent the winter of 1909-1910, in New York City. While there, she sold a play, *The Conscience of Sarah Platt*, to producer David Belasco, although it was never produced due to a dispute between Belasco and the intended star.<sup>412</sup> Gerstenberg made several trips to New York City between 1910 and 1913 to write and promote her work.<sup>413</sup> These trips were productive: in 1912, she had one of her plays, *Captain Joe*, produced by students at the Academy of Dramatic Art, and her first novel, *Unquenched Fire*, was published.<sup>414</sup> In the midst of this brush with commercial success, Gerstenberg was urged to audition for Maurice Browne and Ellen Van Volkenburg’s Chicago Little Theatre by Bess Goodrich, a Bryn Mawr

---

<sup>410</sup> Campbell, Hugh Stuart. “News of the Society World.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Nov. 29, 1908: G8. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>411</sup> “News of the Society Worlds: Numerous Box Parities at Extra Matinee of...” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Apr. 23, 1909: 11. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>412</sup> Hecht, Stuart J. “The Plays of Alice Gerstenberg: Cultural Hegemony in the American Little Theatre.” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 26.1 (1992): 1–16. Crossref. Web. 17 Jan 2017. 3.

<sup>413</sup> “More Disclosures Expected in Western Indiana Case.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* May 11, 1910: 9. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018; “Society, Meetings & Entertainments: Anti-Divorce Afternoons Quaker City Society Plan.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Aug. 15, 1911: 6. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018; Mme. X. “News of the Society World: Striking Points of Similarity Between Chicago and Perugia.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* May 19, 1912: B1. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018; Kirkwood, Edith Brown. “News of the Society World: Colonies of City’s Younger Set Making New Homes in the West.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Sept. 14, 1913: D2. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>414</sup> “Wife ‘Bum’; Spent Her Money.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb. 9, 1912: 3. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018; “Article 3 -- No Title.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Apr. 21, 1912: I3. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.

classmate.<sup>415</sup> She performed with the company for its first season, 1912 - 1913, appearing in *Anatol* and the original production of *The Trojan Women*. Her time with the Little Theatre was contentious: Gerstenberg was part of the group of actors that confronted Maurice Browne over his autocratic leadership of the company, which led to her departure. Her archives at the Newberry Library contain almost no record of her time with the Little Theatre; several of her scrapbooks that date from this period have clearly had items removed. One page contains the following handwritten note:

This letter was sent by the Chicago Little Theatre Co. April 5, 1913, to Maurice Browne is probably the only one that has survived the years. At the end of the first season the company had complaints. As no understanding could be reached the company resigned. The players used in the second year were all newcomers with a few exceptions. The cast that had helped to build the theatre, that had donated its services and genuinely and generously sought a true success could not continue. A few years later the Chicago Little Theatre went on the rocks as the first company had feared it would, if not managed differently. The letter explains the situation.

There is no letter. The above passage is followed by another handwritten note: "I destroyed the letter. It is enough that he wrote his book 'Too Late to Lament' which revealed his regret about many many matching incidents. A.G."<sup>416</sup>

---

<sup>415</sup> Hecht, "The Plays of Alice Gerstenberg..." 3.

<sup>416</sup> Scrapbook #2. *Alice Gerstenberg Papers (1903 – 1971)*. Newberry Library, Chicago.

Dukore, who interviewed Gerstenberg in 1956 saw the original letter, and notes that it accused Browne “...of having, in defiance of previous agreements with the members of the company, usurped complete and absolute control of the Chicago Little Theatre.”<sup>417</sup> The basis of her disagreement with Browne centered on issues of ensemble: of collective decision-making and shared responsibility. Gerstenberg clearly wished to be part of an ensemble, rather than a dictatorship. In the formation of Chicago’s habitus, this is a significant moment: Gerstenberg wished to foster greater collectivity and collegiality and, when she was unable to do so within the confines of an ensemble, she opted to leave. She subsequently joined another theatre company, the Players’ Workshop, which was run as a collective. Gerstenberg’s role in trying to reform an existing ensemble, then leaving and joining or forming another ensemble, is also a feature of the habitus of Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre. From Gerstenberg’s perspective, her time with the Chicago Little Theatre was a lacuna in her career as a writer – the Little Theatre never produced any of her plays. However, through the negative experience of working with Browne and his company, she seems to have refined her ideas about founding, organizing, and sustaining an experimental, amateur theatre company.

Gerstenberg returned to New York in the fall of 1913 and turned her efforts to writing for the commercial stage. Her first effort proved to be a test of her resolve: she co-wrote a musical comedy with Paul Bartholomae, variously known as *A Model Maid*, *Miss Daisy* or *At the Ball*, that appeared in 1914. One reporter noted, “Some of her ideas were appropriated, her name was left off the program, and litigation followed. The musical comedy was acted in New

---

<sup>417</sup> Dukore, Bernard. “Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre.” Diss. U of Illinois. 1957. Print. 13.



York, and if it had been as clever in the first act it might have been the success it wasn't."<sup>418</sup>

Gerstenberg took her case directly to the press, detailing her male co-author's various deceptions along the way, and stating that it is important to her career to have her name on a play running in New York, as she has several plays "in the hands of agents." Gerstenberg made it clear to Bartholomae and the rest of the world that she is not just a "society girl playwright," but a professional.<sup>419</sup> Her name was restored to the program, just in time for the play to receive terrible reviews.<sup>420</sup>

This debacle was followed by one of her biggest successes, a version of *Alice in Wonderland* with music by Eric Delamarter.<sup>421</sup> It was produced professionally in 1915 at the Fine Arts Building, then transferred to New York, where it played at the Booth Theatre for four weeks.<sup>422</sup> *Alice in Wonderland* would be revived numerous times in Chicago by amateur groups - in 1921, 1931, 1933, and 1939 - usually with Gerstenberg's involvement.<sup>423</sup> In March 1915, Gerstenberg's *The Conscience of Sarah Platt* was published as a novel – this had been the script

---

<sup>418</sup> "About Alice's Stage Mother." *New York Times (1857-1922)* Apr. 4, 1915: X5. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>419</sup> "Notes of the Plays and Players." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Oct. 4, 1914: G1. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>420</sup> Hammond, Percy. "Music and Theatre: 'At the Ball,' Yes – and No." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Dec. 26, 1914: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>421</sup> Kirkwood, Edith Brown. "News of the Society World: Colonies of City's Younger Set Making New Homes in the West." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Sept. 14, 1913: D2. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018; "Notes of the Plays and Players." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Oct. 4, 1914: G1. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018; Hammond, Percy. "Music and the Theater: 'Alice in Wonderland' at the Fine Arts." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb. 12, 1915: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>422</sup> Hecht, "The Plays of Alice Gerstenberg..." 4; "Vivian Tobin Charms as Alice: Lewis Carroll's Classic Characters in a..." *New York Tribune (1911-1922)* Mar. 24, 1915: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>423</sup> Butler, Sheppard. "Here and There in the Theaters." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec. 15, 1921: 19. *ProQuest*. Web. 19 July 2016. C, C. "The Stage 1-12-31." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 12, 1931: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016. Collins, Charles. "Events on the Stage." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 7, 1933: 19. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016; Page, Eleanor. "Masks for Junior League Play." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 15, 1939: 35. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.

David Belasco bought, but never produced.<sup>424</sup> In November of that year, Gerstenberg's play *Overtones* was produced by the Washington Square Players, to acclaim.<sup>425</sup> The play depicts a meeting between two women in love with the same man, one of whom married him for love, the other rejected him over money. Gerstenberg stages the women alongside their subconscious selves, who are played by two other actresses. The play predates Eugene O'Neill's use of a similar device by several years, a fact not lost on a Chicago theatre critic in his review of *Strange Interlude* in 1927; "Miss Gerstenberg managed to put the notion across in twenty minutes; whereas Mr. O'Neill's play, which is in innumerable acts, requires for complete performing hours and hours and hours and hours...."<sup>426</sup> *Overtones* was played in Vaudeville by Helen Lackaye, and served as Lily Langtry's farewell appearance in London.<sup>427</sup> It became a popular piece for little theatre productions, and is probably her most frequently produced play.

Of this period, Hecht notes, that "Despite growing national recognition, Gerstenberg remained in Chicago, where she participated in the city's cultural and artistic life. Each new Chicago theatre spurred her to write more plays, though inevitably most of the theatres themselves failed."<sup>428</sup> Gerstenberg's decision to remain in Chicago should not be viewed as a retreat from New York; rather, she found greater opportunity and had – due to her social position – greater agency in her hometown to affect the kind of change she wished to see.

Chansky notes:

---

<sup>424</sup> "Display Ad 6 -- No Title." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Mar. 27, 1915: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>425</sup> Mantle, Burns. "'Back Home' Sentiment Leaves New Yorkers Cold." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Nov. 28, 1915: E1. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>426</sup> F. D. "Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 6, 1927: 33. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.

<sup>427</sup> Hecht, "The Plays of Alice Gerstenberg. . ." 4.

<sup>428</sup> Hecht. "The Plays of Alice Gerstenberg..." 4.

Gerstenberg had her share of commercial and New York success, but her plays and her investment in community – specifically her Chicago – embody the concerns for fellowship, self-expression, and anti-commercialism that Little Theatre – a movement spearheaded by amateurs and educators – fought for.<sup>429</sup>

These qualities of “fellowship, self-expression, and anti-commercialism” that Gerstenberg fostered, are the dispositions that underlie Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre habitus.

In 1916, Gerstenberg began her involvement with the Players’ Workshop, an experimental theatre focused on playwrights located in the bohemian arts colony on the city’s south side.<sup>430</sup> Although perhaps not a founder of the group, she soon emerged as a leading member. Three of her plays were produced by the group: *The Pot Boiler*, *Beyond*, and *The War Game*, and she authored an article for *Theatre* magazine about the activities of the Workshop during its first season.<sup>431</sup> The group splintered in 1917, with one faction led by Frederick Bruegger retaining the “Players’ Workshop” name and moving to a nearby public school building, and another led by Elisha and Helen Cook taking over the former Chicago Little Theatre space in the Fine Arts building, first adopting the name The Playshop and later the Philistine Theatre.<sup>432</sup> Gerstenberg was associated with the latter, although none of her work

---

<sup>429</sup> Chansky, Dorothy. "Alice Gerstenberg and the 'Experimental Trap'." *Midwestern Miscellany* 30. (2002): 21-34. Print. 22.

<sup>430</sup> "Society and Entertainments: Lake Forest Plays Bridge in French." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* July 24, 1916: 14. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>431</sup> Gerstenberg, Alice. "The Players’ Workshop of Chicago." *The Theatre Magazine* Sept 1917: 142. Print. 142.

<sup>432</sup> "The Philistine’ Takes Rooms of Little Theatre." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Aug. 25, 1917: 13. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

appears to have been presented by the group during their brief life.<sup>433</sup> World War I closed both the Players' Workshop and the Philistine; Hecht notes that the Chicago art theatre scene changed; the avant-garde relocated to Greenwich Village, and, at least in Chicago "... the era of experimentation and challenge to the status quo was over."<sup>434</sup>

After the war, Gerstenberg turned her talents towards organizing amateur theatre for Chicago society. In March 1918, she staged a production of *The Pot Boiler* at Chicago's Arts Club, a private club founded in 1916 "...to encourage higher standards of art, maintain galleries for that purpose, and to promote the mutual acquaintance of art lovers and art workers." Gerstenberg and her mother were founding members.<sup>435</sup> It attracted 260 people, well in excess of the seventy-five expected; "Even the jolly little play by Miss Alice Gerstenberg had to be given in two sections in the long picture gallery, one for the early-to-beds and commuters, the other for the gay mondaines."<sup>436</sup> She soon became head of the Arts Club Drama Committee, and play productions became a regular part of the club's programming.<sup>437</sup> In this capacity, Gerstenberg for the first time used her social position to aid the development of Chicago's artistic community; in 1919, the Arts Club sent out a call for "dramatic authors who desire experimental performance of their works," under the auspices of Gerstenberg, chairman

---

<sup>433</sup> "At the Little and Experimental Theatres, 1918." *Theatre Arts* Dec. 1917: 60. Print. 60; "At the Little and Experimental Theatres." *Theatre Arts* Feb. 1918: 111. Print. 111; "'The Philistine' Takes Rooms of Little Theatre." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Aug. 25, 1917: 13. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>434</sup> Hecht, "The Plays of Alice Gerstenberg. . ." 5.

<sup>435</sup> "Society and Entertainments: Benefit Bridge Party Provides for Children." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Mar. 11, 1918: 15. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018; "History." The Arts Club of Chicago. <http://www.artsclubchicago.org/about/history/>.

<sup>436</sup> "News of Music." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Mar. 12, 1918: 11. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>437</sup> "News of Chicago Society." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Feb. 16, 1919: C4. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.

of the drama committee.<sup>438</sup> This appeal – to aid budding playwrights in the development of their work – was clearly inspired by the mission of Players' Workshop. It would also serve as the mission for her greatest influence as a Chicago producer, the Playwrights Theatre, which she founded in 1922 and continued until 1945.<sup>439</sup>

Another Gerstenberg-founded project was the Junior League Children's Theatre, which began organizational efforts in 1919, and culminated with a production of *Alice in Wonderland* in December 1921.<sup>440</sup> The women of the Junior League, under Gerstenberg's direction, presented her play at the Fine Arts Building on Saturday mornings for over six weeks in the winter of 1921–22. The experiment was so successful that they immediately began rehearsing a second production, *The Little Princess*, also directed by Gerstenberg.<sup>441</sup> In *Composing Ourselves*, Chansky notes that her work with the women of the Junior League was particularly significant because, like much of her theatre work, it:

... challenges ideas about theatrical significance because she crossed the lines between "art" and "community" with seeming abandon and because the designation "experimental" is so often reserved for the former. Yet she enabled people who might otherwise not have chosen to do theatre or who might have done it with less guidance to turn their expressive and teamwork energies

---

<sup>438</sup> "News of the Theatre: At the Majestic." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Mar. 26, 1919: 19. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>439</sup> Chansky, "Alice Gerstenberg and the 'Experimental' Trap" 22.

<sup>440</sup> "Ask Volunteers for Wholesale Price Tag Plan: Clyne Declares Honest Merchants Can Drive Prices Down." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec. 21, 1919: A6. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018; Butler, Sheppard. "Here and There in the Theaters." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec. 15, 1921: 19. *ProQuest*. Web. 19 July 2016.

<sup>441</sup> "Junior Leaguers Plan Second Play for the Children." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Jan. 21, 1922: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 19 July 2016.

precisely to theatre, by willingly venturing into new territories. She founded the Junior League's children's theatre in 1921 because she realized that the league president's request to start a theatre group would pose a rehearsal problem for an adult-focused venture. The young women members, most of whom were married, were expected to be home at night, and working men could not rehearse during the day. Gerstenberg proposed plays for children, since many of the then-popular fairy tales and stories about children lent themselves to all-female casts. Her idea was to give opportunities to more young women, but she was also aware of these particular amateur participants' need for assurance that cross-gender casting would not make them look ridiculous, as it might well have in a realist or classical endeavor. Also, plays for children were not being offered elsewhere in Chicago.<sup>442</sup>

Gerstenberg's involvement seems to have been limited to the first year, but the Junior League continued to stage plays for children annually into the 1960s.<sup>443</sup>

With the Junior League Children's Theatre, Gerstenberg appears to have found her footing as a producer. Her next endeavor was much closer to her heart – the Playwrights Theater of Chicago, which she launched in the spring of 1922.<sup>444</sup> The *Tribune's* society columnist Madame X, stated that Playwrights mission was to develop Chicago's playwrights and

---

<sup>442</sup>Chansky, *Composing Ourselves* 180-1

<sup>443</sup> Page, Eleanor. "Masks for Junior League Play." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 15, 1939: 35. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016; Page, Eleanor. "Who Was That Dragon?" *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Nov. 21, 1965: E1. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>444</sup> "First Production of Playwrights to be Staged Sunday." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Apr. 4, 1922: 23. *ProQuest*. Web. 19 July 2016.

offer them the chance to see their work produced. "It is hoped by this means to develop a hitherto neglected art, that of writing good plays, plays that have intrinsic merit and that can vie with the productions in Paris and London."<sup>445</sup> On a Sunday night in April, 1922 Gerstenberg staged her *Overtones* at Powers Theatre using amateur actors.<sup>446</sup> The event was essentially a society fundraiser to establish the group.<sup>447</sup> In this way, Gerstenberg used her social connections to further her artistic agenda in Chicago.

The mission of Playwrights Theatre was to develop Chicago's writers. "The playwrights whose works are taken into consideration must be American or, if of foreign birth, must be living in this community and a part of Chicago."<sup>448</sup> Towards this end, Gerstenberg solicited audience feedback, an idea she borrowed from George Pierce Baker's 47 Workshop at Harvard, and held play reading events and discussions.<sup>449</sup> In 1923, the company staged Mary Aldis' *The Will of the People* at the Fine Arts Building with a cast that included some professional actors.<sup>450</sup> The group did not stage another play until *The Truth About Blayds* in 1926 at the Vic Theatre.<sup>451</sup> Play production seems to have been secondary to new play development. By 1927, the Playwrights Theater held weekly play reading sessions on Tuesdays at the Tudor room of the Palace Theatre. Until 1936, when they obtained their own space, Playwrights Theatre produced shows sporadically at locations such as the Women's Athletic Club, the Goodman Theatre, and

---

<sup>445</sup> Mme, X. "News of Chicago Society: Graceful Gliders." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 28, 1923: 2. ProQuest. Web. 20 July 2016.

<sup>446</sup> Mme, X. "News of Chicago Society: Graceful Gliders."

<sup>447</sup> "First Production of Playwrights to be Staged Sunday."

<sup>448</sup> Mme, X. "News of Chicago Society – Diplomat's Visit..." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 30, 1927: 2. ProQuest. Web. 21 July 2016.

<sup>449</sup> Mme, X. "News of Chicago Society: Graceful Gliders."

<sup>450</sup> Butler, Sheppard. "That \$100,000,000 Merger; Curtain Time at the Play." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 21, 1923: 2. ProQuest. Web. 20 July 2016.

<sup>451</sup> Mme, X. "News of Chicago Society – Diplomat's Visit..."

the Arts Club, all institutions with which Gerstenberg had connections.<sup>452</sup> In what would come to characterize Off-Loop theatre in later decades, Playwrights Theatre created their own space at 1120 N. Dearborn in 1936, turning an old barn into a 150-seat theatre.<sup>453</sup> It is unclear how long they remained here; after 1942, their activities appear to have been limited to a yearly engagement at the Arts Club.<sup>454</sup> The group became inactive after World War II.

Theatre critics, such as the *Tribune's* Sheppard Butler, tended to be dismissive of Playwrights Theatre. Butler prefaced his review of their second production with a terse, "The Playwrights' Theater of Chicago, (...) proposes further indulgence of its members' inclination to write and act their own plays."<sup>455</sup> Gerstenberg's productions were more frequently covered as society events. However, the society writers were often quite knowledgeable about theatre, even if their coverage tended to focus on who was in the audience and what they wore, and these writers were often impressed with the professionalism of Gerstenberg's productions: "After seeing 'Overtones' at the Powers theater last night one feels disinclined to apply the term 'amateur' to the production, for it was finished both as to the acting and stage sets."<sup>456</sup>

---

<sup>452</sup> Thalia. "Mrs. Carpenter to Talk Today on Decoration." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 5, 1930: 23. ProQuest. Web. 21 July 2016; Thalia. "Society Busy; College Set Coming Home." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 18, 1930: 21. ProQuest. Web. 21 July 2016; De Young, Ruth. "Arts Club Play about Nudists Brings Laughs." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 2, 1934: 17. ProQuest. Web. 22 July 2016.

<sup>453</sup> Cass, Judith. "Dancing Party Set for May 29 at Shoreacres." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 13, 1936: 25. ProQuest. Web. 22 July 2016.

<sup>454</sup> Cass, Judith. "Wooded Trails Lure Guests at Virginia Resort." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 7, 1942: 23. ProQuest. Web. 22 July 2016; Cass, Judith. "War Time Brings Cancellation of Traditional Class Reunions." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 26, 1943: 21. ProQuest. Web. 22 July 2016; Cass, Judith. "Elizabeth Dunne to be Bride of Sgt. McCauley Tomorrow." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 16, 1944: 15. ProQuest. Web. 22 July 2016.

<sup>455</sup> Butler, Sheppard. "That \$100,000,000 Merger; Curtain Time at the Play."

<sup>456</sup> "'Overtones' Given before Brilliant Society Audience." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Apr. 10, 1922: 25. ProQuest. Web. 19 July 2016



Gerstenberg had been a colleague of Kenneth Sawyer Goodman in her Players' Workshop days; in 1919, she staged three of Goodman's plays at the Arts Club in his memory, and was in attendance for the first production at the Goodman Memorial Theatre in January 1926.<sup>457</sup> Despite her personal connection to Goodman, she had no real involvement with the Goodman Memorial Theatre until June 1930, when she became a minor player in the drama surrounding the ouster of director Thomas Wood Stevens. It was variously announced that she had joined "the executive staff" of the Goodman for "exploitation work" – presumably this meant publicity or marketing.<sup>458</sup> Beyond these mentions in society columns, there is little to suggest that Gerstenberg held anything more than an honorary or advisory role. She was likely brought into the fray by beleaguered Art Institute board members to give the appearance of responsiveness to the charges of unfairness the institution was faced with over Steven's dismissal.<sup>459</sup> Whatever her actual duties at the Goodman, she used the situation to her advantage: Playwrights Theatre staged two productions at the Goodman in January and February of 1931, Gerstenberg's *Latch Keys* and an evening of one-acts by Mary Aldis, Elisha Cook, and Helen Walton.<sup>460</sup> If the Goodman was attempting to exploit Gerstenberg's reputation to rehabilitate their public image, she was getting something out of the deal as well – Playwrights had a home for the season.

---

<sup>457</sup> "Society's Patrons of the Arts Turn Out for Opening of 'Gas'." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Jan. 28, 1926: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016; Mme. X. "Comment: News of Chicago Society It's Never Too Dry and Never Too Wet in Faraway Sweden." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872 – 1922) May 25, 1919: D2. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>458</sup> Thalia. "Junior League Play Expert Visiting here." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Dec. 6, 1930: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016; "First Night Luxuries." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Nov. 16, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.

<sup>459</sup> Jewett, Eleanor. "Facts Wanted on Goodman Row." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) June 22, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>460</sup> "Society Busy; College Set Coming Home." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Dec. 18, 1930: 21. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016; C, C. "The Stage." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Jan. 1, 1931: 35. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.

The following season, the Goodman produced *When Chicago Was Young*. Gerstenberg co-wrote the play with Herma Clark, a *Tribune* columnist who had a long-running column on local history and nostalgia that recounted stories of early Chicago. The play told the fictional story of a Chicago family set against the backdrop of the city's history, referencing such figures as the Palmer family and the Great Fire of 1871. The play, staged in the depths of the depression, served as a fundraiser for local charities, and seems to have worked as something of a morale booster for the public. Its initial production was covered heavily by the social press, and barely at all by local theatre critics, although this may have had more to do with the fact that most of the cast of seventy-five were amateurs.<sup>461</sup> Hecht notes that the *New York Times* did review it, calling it "mild and formless."<sup>462</sup> *When Chicago Was Young* obviously had great local appeal, and served to reinforce a sense of community in the city, "Most of the names mentioned by the actors and actresses on the stage as being prominent in Chicago's development and growth were represented by children and grandchildren of those early Chicagoans in last night's audience."<sup>463</sup> The play is interesting in that the subject matter, and the performance itself simultaneously created and reinforced the idea of community. The work continued to perform this function in its numerous updates and a sequel: an updated version was revived at Christmas in 1937 at the Studebaker Theatre in the Fine Arts Building, again as a benefit for local charities. It received a tepid review from Clark's employer, the *Tribune*: the two most telling statements being "It as the spirit of municipal enthusiasm which inspired the

---

<sup>461</sup> "Billy Bryant Gives Chicago Showboat Acting of 'Hamlet'." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 6, 1932: 1. ProQuest. Web. 21 July 2016.

<sup>462</sup> Hecht, "The Plays of Alice Gerstenberg..." 12.

<sup>463</sup> Cass, Judith. "Society Turns Out for Two Charity Events." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 8, 1932: 15. ProQuest. Web. 21 July 2016.

founders. . ." and describing it as "sentimental and nostalgic."<sup>464</sup> While these descriptions seem to exclude the play from the realm of great stage literature, it held great appeal as an exercise in civic pride.

In 1941, *Port of Chicago*, described as a "streamlined" version of the play, was produced by the Playwrights Theatre.<sup>465</sup> Two years later, *Port of Chicago* was produced by the Uptown Players, a long-running amateur theatre group that began at the People's Church of Uptown in the early 1920s.<sup>466</sup> Their production was held over for a month, performed on local radio, and became an annual event, with revivals in 1944 and 1945.<sup>467</sup> That the play itself seems to have benefitted the Uptown Players is indicated by an article on their 1944 revival:

So a typically Chicago group presents the history of its home town. Now one of the few remaining little theaters in the middle west, the Uptown Players have grown from a small unit of ten people to a fluctuating roll call of several hundred.

Twenty years ago, J. Bradley-Griffin, director and founder, presented his plays in Channing Hall of the People's church. Later they moved to the Chicago Woman's club theater, where they remained for several years. Last season they

---

<sup>464</sup> Collins, Charles. "Play Touches High Spots of City's History." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923 – 1963)* Dec. 27, 1937: 8. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.

<sup>465</sup> "Play of Chicago Will Be Given for Dixon PTA." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 30, 1941: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.

<sup>466</sup> Cass, Judith. "Girls in Lead as More Births are Announced." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 20, 1943: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.

<sup>467</sup> "Notes of the Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 31, 1943: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018; "Herma Clark Play on Bond Wagon Tomorrow." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 14, 1943: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016; "Drama Notes." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Sept. 24, 1944: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016; "Bomb Explosion Will Modernize Chicago Drama." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Sept. 23, 1945: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.

purchased the old La Salle Street church and members remodeled it into their own theater. Now for the first time since the Uptown Players came into being, they are rehearsing, creating, producing and presenting plays under one roof.<sup>468</sup>

Gerstenberg's forays into theatre production mostly engaged her own community – that of Chicago's social elite. By contrast, the Uptown Players had a much humbler origin – they began as a community theatre group based in a Unitarian Church in Chicago's gritty Uptown neighborhood. By its very longevity, the group demonstrates that Gerstenberg's mission of bringing theatre and theatre production to Chicago had taken root beyond the city's social elite, that it had found an anchor in the neighborhoods beyond Gerstenberg's Gold Coast. The mere existence and persistence of a group like the Uptown Players attests to the success of Gerstenberg's aim of promoting and perpetuating Little Theatre values in her hometown, and it is significant to note that in their 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Program, which likely dates from 1949, the list of former Uptown Players includes recognizable names such as Janet Gaynor, Tyrone Power, and Melvyn Douglas.<sup>469</sup> By fostering both community and community theatre, Gerstenberg was growing habitus itself. *When Chicago Was Young* and *Port of Chicago* in their various iterations and productions, consistently received lukewarm reviews from critics. Nevertheless, the plays were significant in their performance of civic identity: regardless of whether it was staged by professional actors for a charity benefit or an amateur community theatre group from Uptown,

---

<sup>468</sup> "Saga of Chicago Portrayed by Uptown Actors." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Oct. 8, 1944: 2. ProQuest. Web. 22 July 2016.

<sup>469</sup> "25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Program, Uptown Players" *Alice Gerstenberg Papers* (1903 – 1971). Newberry Library, Chicago.

the plays consistently enacted a sense of community for a Chicago audience, saying “this is who we are, and this is how we tell our own story.”

Gerstenberg’s last venture into commercial theatre occurred during World War II, when *Victory Belles*, a farce about women seeking husbands during wartime, had a tumultuous two-month run on Broadway. One reviewer called it “the season’s most pathetic production.”<sup>470</sup> It was her last foray into commercial theatre. In the mid-1950s, she was paid the honor of having a theatre group named for her, the Alice Gerstenberg Experimental Theatre Workshop. This was an amateur group that seems to have continued the mission of the now-defunct Playwrights Theatre. It was founded in 1955 by Paul E. Pross, Jr. and Otto Anderson. Little is known about either of the founders or the group itself. In one article, Pross is described as “... a young business man who has had considerable theater and TV experience,” although there is little outside evidence of this.<sup>471</sup> Several letters from Pross to Gerstenberg held in her archive that date from the early 1960s are written on the letterhead of “The Windfall Press,” and in them, Pross describes opening his new office, suggesting that he worked in the publishing industry.

One of the few archival items related to the Alice Gerstenberg Experimental Theatre Workshop is a small, hardcover book that documents the group’s second year, the 1957 – 1958 season. The book is a combination of production yearbook combined with reviews and critical essays written by group members. It details six performances, mostly evenings of one-acts

---

<sup>470</sup> Guernsey, Jr., Otis L. “Victory Belles.” *New York Herald Tribune* (1926-1962) Oct. 27, 1943: 18A. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>471</sup> Loring, Kathryn. “Daughter Will Tour East with Mother’s Three Act Comedy.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) June 8, 1958: G5. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

staged as the entertainment at a club meeting or convention. Reviews of the performances written by group members follow each listing. These reviews are often brutally honest, if not equally incisive or well-written, and indicate that the group valued feedback. Four of Gerstenberg's plays were produced over the course of the season, including the premier *On the Beam*, which deals with aging. Gerstenberg also contributed a review of the three-act comedy *Beauty for Sale* by Adeline Pynchon. The group was ambitious, with plans for playwriting clinics and workshop productions detailed on the inside dustjacket of the book, but there does not seem to have been a 1958–59 season.

In the early 1960s, Gerstenberg began to withdraw from public life. She wrote an autobiography in 1962; it was never published although the manuscript is on file at the Chicago History Museum. By 1965, she had moved to Minneapolis: Gerstenberg never married, but may have made the move to be near other family members or friends. She began donating her papers to the Newberry Library around this time, and maintained a correspondence with the library staff that lasted until shortly before her death in 1972. On New Year's Eve 1972, she wrote the following to librarian Diana Haskell. After recounting her memories of New Year's Eve, 1900, Gerstenberg continues:

How I ramble!

In the past I would have typed this off in a stream of consciousness, but strength is lacking now.

A hazardous heart now allows me to faint, unexpectedly, and I am kindly watched against injury. I cannot go out anymore or do much, and cherish

friendships through correspondence. Mrs. Amy Nyholm there used to write to me. If she is still there my regards to her! Also to Mr. Wells who kindly wrote a while ago.

I hope you are enjoying my life as it comes into your working day. (...)

Well, the world is billions of years old, and years to come will wash most everything away like the ocean upon sand. But for the present, you and your friends at the Newberry dedicate time and attention to glorify the art of living! May many blessings reward all!

God love you, Diana Haskell!

Alice Gerstenberg<sup>472</sup>

Gerstenberg died in July 1972, at age eighty-six. No obituary appeared in the Chicago newspapers.

As her life and career were winding down, new forces in the world of theatre, both locally and on the national level, were emerging: the regional and repertory theatre movement of the 1950s and 1960s was gaining purchase nationally, the revival of Hull-House Theatre programs under Robert Sickinger got under way in the early 1960s, and by 1969, the Off-Loop theatre movement itself would begin in earnest. Although Gerstenberg had little to do directly with any of these things, it is important to note that from the first sparks of the art theatre/little theatre movement in the early 1900s until the eventual ignition of the Off-Loop scene in 1969,

---

<sup>472</sup> Gerstenberg, Alice. "Letter to Diana Haskell." *Alice Gerstenberg Papers (1903 – 1971)*. Newberry Library, Chicago.

Gerstenberg kept the fire kindled in Chicago. In her lifetime, she was acknowledged to be a (if not *the*) leader of Chicago's non-professional, non-profit, non-commercial theatre community. Her namesake theatre acknowledged this in 1958: "Her numerous achievements are beyond complete enumeration, for she has made a very definite contribution to Chicago by the devotion of a lifetime to its dramatic endeavor."<sup>473</sup>

Gerstenberg is significant to the disposition of Off-Loop theatre because, perhaps more than any other figure, she serves as a direct link between the art theatre movement of the early century through to the years just prior to the Off-Loop theatre scene. She was also important because of her dedication to the city: she remained in Chicago for most of her life, even though she could – and, as some argue, perhaps, should – have moved to New York and pursued playwriting more single-mindedly. Her decision to remain in Chicago was apparently driven not by fear of failure – she had lived in New York as a young woman and had achieved some success there as a playwright and author on her own terms– but rather, from a love for her hometown and a desire to foster its artistic life. Dorothy Chansky quotes Gerstenberg as saying: "The Little Theatre must grow roots deep in its own area because that is where it functions to benefit the inhabitants there." Her subsequent work, at establishing theatre groups and producing theatre under the auspices of women's clubs and social organizations, helped to embed and ingrain theatre into the social fabric of the city. She remained dedicated to the ideas of experimentation and amateur, community-based theatre production – learned at the Chicago Little Theatre, refined at the Players' Workshop, practiced at the Junior League Children's

---

<sup>473</sup> Pross, Paul Edward, Otto E. Anderson and Alice Gerstenberg, eds. *The Alice Gerstenberg Experimental Theatre Workshop*. Chicago. 1958. Print. Inside cover.



Theatre and Playwrights Theatre, and carried on by others in her name. The values that she learned in the early days of the art theatre movement are the ones she continued to foster in her subsequent work as a playwright, producer, and arts patron in Chicago. Dorothy Chansky writes: “Alice Gerstenberg’s career is unthinkable outside the parameters and influence of the Little Theatre Movement. She took seriously a belief in the local and in the value, for participants in all departments, of a supportive community of theatre workers.”<sup>474</sup> She contributed to the development of generations of playwrights, directors, and actors in the city of Chicago. She contributed to the dispositions of Off-Loop theatre by supporting innovation, focusing on developing Chicago-based talent – specifically playwriting talent, and evincing a devotion and dedication to Chicago as an arts community, and she did so unabated for nearly fifty years. Gerstenberg’s long career kept alive the ideas and ideals of the little theatre movement, so that these ideas could be reactivated in the 1960s, and become part of the habitus of Off-Loop theatre.

Gerstenberg fostered and fought for the idea of ensemble throughout her life. This was evident early on, when she challenged Maurice Browne’s leadership at the Chicago Little Theatre. Her issue with Browne centered on the idea of ensemble: she favored collective decision making and shared responsibility. In the formation of Chicago’s habitus, this is a significant moment for two reasons: Gerstenberg wished to foster greater collectivity and collegiality and, when she was unable to do so, opted to leave. She subsequently became part of the Players’ Workshop, which was run as a collective. Her avowed commitment to a

---

<sup>474</sup>Chansky, *Composing Ourselves* 184.

collective ensemble approach – something she was willing to fight for – and, that proved unsuccessful, to leave and start her own company, are also dispositions of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre habitus.

Gerstenberg's career is also significant because of her focus on building a theatre community. Her forays into theatre production mostly engaged her own community – that of Chicago's social elite. However, Gerstenberg's play *Port of Chicago* became an annual production for the Uptown Players, a community theatre group based in a Unitarian Church in Chicago's gritty Uptown neighborhood. By its very longevity, the Uptown Players demonstrate that Gerstenberg's mission of bringing theatre and theatre production to Chicago had taken root beyond the city's social elite, that it had found an anchor in the neighborhoods beyond Gerstenberg's Gold Coast. The fact that a group like the Uptown Players flourished attests to the success of Gerstenberg's aim of promoting and perpetuating Little Theatre values in her hometown, and it is significant to note that in their Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Program, which likely dates from 1949, the list of former Uptown Players includes recognizable names such as Janet Gaynor, Tyrone Power, and Melvyn Douglas.<sup>475</sup> By fostering both community and community theatre, Gerstenberg was growing habitus itself.

### **The Goodman Memorial Theatre**

The Goodman Memorial Theatre was a legacy of Chicago's pre-war art theatre movement. As an organization, it began as a crystallization of the lessons learned from the New Theatre, Donald Robertson's groups, the Chicago Theatre Society, the Chicago Little Theatre,

---

<sup>475</sup> "25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Program, Uptown Players." *Alice Gerstenberg Papers (1903 – 1971)*. Newberry Library, Chicago.

the Players' Workshop, and Hull-House Players: it was to be a professional art theatre ensemble supported by an endowment, and a professional training school. It was to be free from commercial concerns, and devoted to the new drama and the training of future theatre artists. Sadly, much of the history of Goodman Memorial Theatre diverges from this founding purpose, largely due to the interference of the Art Institute of Chicago, the organization in which the theatre was housed. The history of the Goodman is one of a promising start, followed by decades of struggle to get back to the original purpose of the organization.

The theatre was established by the Goodman family as a memorial to playwright and theatre supporter Kenneth Sawyer Goodman, who died in the 1918 influenza epidemic while serving in the Naval Reserves. As such, it grew directly out of the pre-World War I art theatre/little theatre movement. In 1922, Goodman's parents donated \$250,000 to the Art Institute to construct a theatre and establish an endowment to support a professional repertory company and theatre training school in his memory.<sup>476</sup> The Kenneth Sawyer Goodman Memorial Theatre building was designed by architect Howard Van Doren Shaw, a friend of the Goodman family, on the lake-facing side of the Art Institute. Thomas Wood Stevens, who had been Kenneth Goodman's friend and mentor, was hired as director of the theatre and drama program.<sup>477</sup>

Stevens had taught at the Art Institute when Goodman was a student, but had since moved on to the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, where he founded the nation's first degree-

---

<sup>476</sup> Newell, James S. "A Critical Analysis of The Development and Growth of the Kenneth Sawyer Goodman Memorial Theatre and School of Drama, Chicago, Illinois, 1925-1971." Diss. Wayne State, 1973. 57.

<sup>477</sup> Newell 2-3.

granting college theatre program.<sup>478</sup> He was involved in all stages of planning for the Goodman school, company, and facility.<sup>479</sup> Under his visionary leadership, the Goodman Memorial Theatre was both a professional repertory theatre company and a conservatory training program, housed within the Art Institute. In a document titled “The Plan of the Drama Department,” from 1925, Stevens wrote:

When you attend the Goodman Theatre you may come upon a classic which has not seen the light of stage for years, or a play by one of the important modern authors who are accepted by the critics but unregarded in the commercial market; or you may find yourself assisting at the first public test of a play with a future – an even more exciting evening’s work. That is why the inscription of Kenneth Goodman’s was chosen for the stone lintel over the entrance: “To restore the old visions and to win the new.”<sup>480</sup>

Stevens’ vision for the Goodman theatre carried forward the ideals of the little theatre movement that he and Kenneth Goodman had shared a passion for: a professional repertory art theatre company and training program in service to both the classics and contemporary plays and stagecraft. Newell comments that the Goodman Theatre was one of the first examples of the professionalization of amateur, non-commercial theatre.<sup>481</sup>

---

<sup>478</sup> Newell 52.

<sup>479</sup> Newell 3.

<sup>480</sup> Stevens, Thomas Wood. “The Plan of the Drama Department.” *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907 – 1951)* 19.6 (1925): 67-69. JSTOR. Web. 17 May 2018.

<sup>481</sup> Newell 5.

The initial repertory company of the Goodman consisted of sixteen members, many of whom had come from Carnegie with Stevens.<sup>482</sup> In addition to performing, the company members also taught classes for the students in the conservatory, earning a salary of \$20 a week.<sup>483</sup> The first class of nineteen students were admitted in January 1925, and the Repertory company began performing dramatic readings for Art Institute members in February and March. The first full performances by the repertory company occurred in April, with a program of one-acts that included Chekhov's *The Boor* and Shaw's *The Man of Destiny*. The first performances took place in Fullerton Hall, which the Robertson company had once used, as the theatre was not completed until the fall of 1925.<sup>484</sup> The 750-seat Goodman Memorial Theatre was dedicated on October 20, 1925 with three plays by Kenneth Sawyer Goodman; *Back of the Yards*, *The Green Scarf*, and *The Game of Chess*.<sup>485</sup> Two days later, the first regular show of the season, Galsworthy's *The Forest* opened.<sup>486</sup>

The repertory company and school were organized as separate entities. The professional company performed on the main stage of the Goodman Theatre, student performances were held in a studio theatre.<sup>487</sup> The company performed an 8-show repertory for the first season, which included Galsworthy's *The Forest*, *The Romantic Young Lady* by G. Martinez Sierra, Moliere's *Don Juan*, Shaw's *Heartbreak House*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and

---

<sup>482</sup> Newell 6.

<sup>483</sup> Newell 80.

<sup>484</sup> Newell 62 - 63.

<sup>485</sup> Jaklon, Mildred. "Art Institute Little Theater is Dedicated." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 22, 1925: 19. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>486</sup> "The New Goodman Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Sept. 27, 1925: 8. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>487</sup> Newell 63.

three plays by American authors.<sup>488</sup> The school was a three-year conservatory program of classes in acting, stagecraft, design, and theatre history – in some cases taught by repertory company members. Student performances took place in a studio theatre, with minimal scenery and costumes. Students occasionally appeared with the professional company in small roles.<sup>489</sup> In the fall of 1925, another class of twenty-five students was admitted.

The company and school grew slowly but steadily through their first five years. Their second season included *Why Marry?* by Jesse Lynch Williams – the first play to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama - *Twelfth Night*, *As You like It*, and *Juno and the Paycock*, which ran for ten weeks due to its popularity, as well as revivals of their productions of *Midsummers*, *Don Juan* and *Everyman*.<sup>490</sup> The 1927-28 season included *She Stoops to Conquer*, Ibsen's *Wild Duck* and *The Vikings in Helgeland* (in honor of Ibsen's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday), another revival of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Little Clay Cart* directed by former Chicago Little Theatre member Cloyd Head, which was revived the following season. In 1928, B. Iden Payne, who had been a friend and colleague of Kenneth Sawyer Goodman, and who had succeeded Thomas Wood Stevens at Carnegie, also joined the Goodman faculty. He directed Gogol's *The Inspector General*. The season also included Pirandello's *Six Character's in Search of an Author*, *Barbara* by Kenneth Sawyer Goodman, Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*, and Sheridan's *The Critic*, which was the hit of the season.<sup>491</sup> H. Leivick's *The Golem* was part of the season.<sup>492</sup>

---

<sup>488</sup> Newell 66.

<sup>489</sup> Thalia. "Goodman Theater Will Provide for Most Modern Plays." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 28, 1929: 39. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>490</sup> Newell 71.

<sup>491</sup> Newell 76.

<sup>492</sup> F, D. "Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 8, 1929: 41. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

Also that year, the Goodman acquired one of its long-term faculty members, almost by accident. As the company was preparing to rehearse a production of *The Golem*, made famous by the Habima Players of Moscow, David Itkin - a former Habima member - happened to come by the Goodman seeking theatre work. Once he made it understood that he had been with Habima, Stevens hired Itkin as an assistant on the spot, despite his limited English. Itkin would remain with the Goodman into the 1950s.<sup>493</sup> The 1929–30 season included *The Field God* by Paul Green, Sheridan's *The Rivals*, *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Payne and using a Shakespearean stage, Galsworthy's *Escape*, and an adaptation of *Around the World in 80 Days*, written by Thomas Wood Stevens' son, Alden B. Stevens.<sup>494</sup> The play choices – classics, European drama, and new American plays – is very much in line with what the “uplifters” of the 1910s advocated, and the Goodman was the only place in Chicago to see this kind of work presented consistently in the late 1920s.

The depression took its toll on the Goodman: the endowment fund created by the Goodman family for financing both the company and training program proved to be insufficient to cover expenses.<sup>495</sup> Audiences for the repertory company consisted primarily of Art Institute members during the first few seasons; it was not until the company's fourth season that the Board of the Art Institute allowed the theatre to sell subscription tickets. There was very little money to advertise, and the location of the theatre – on the back side of the massive Art Institute complex, far from Michigan Ave. – did not encourage much walk-up business. Supportive critics helped build an audience over time; Newell cites in particular Ashton Stevens

---

<sup>493</sup> Newell 77.

<sup>494</sup> Newell 79.

<sup>495</sup> Newell 84.

at the *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, who was coincidentally married to company member Katherine Krug.<sup>496</sup>

Newell cites attendance figures to support the idea that the company was gradually building an audience. In their first season, the company played to houses at an average of forty percent capacity. This number increased steadily to sixty percent capacity by their fourth year, and decreased to fifty-five percent in their fifth year – the first year of the depression.<sup>497</sup>

Newell also makes note of the fact that the company increased the number of shows several times, which suggests greater demand: In the first season, they did four shows per week, this increased to five the following year, and seven in the third season.<sup>498</sup> Finally, single ticket prices were \$1.00 for the public in the first season, \$1.50 the second year, and \$2.00 by the fifth season; the fact that single-ticket prices increased three times within five years indicates that the market was strong enough to bear a price hike. The subscription ticket campaign was announced in the fourth season, and the following year (1929-30), the Goodman had six thousand subscribers. Despite the fact that the audience was increasing, at the end of the 1929-30 season, the theatre had a \$34,895 deficit, which distressed the board of the Art Institute.<sup>499</sup>

Stevens' clash with the Art Institute Board initially concerned finances, but this soon spilled over into artistic freedom. The Director of the Art Institute, Robert B. Harshe, seemed unfamiliar with the mission of the Goodman and unsympathetic with Steven's methods. Harshe charged that the deficit existed because Stevens chose bad plays and spent too much money on

---

<sup>496</sup> Newell 83.

<sup>497</sup> Newell 94.

<sup>498</sup> Conversely, this increase in the number of weekly performances may have spread their audience numbers out over time and decreased their "capacity" figures.

<sup>499</sup> Newell 86 - 93.



extravagant productions. "Harshe thought the theatre should produce more commercially popular and successful Broadway 'hits' and less classical material."<sup>500</sup> This dispute culminated in Stevens' resignation. A popular and charismatic leader, Stevens had recruited almost the entire staff and company members – many had followed him to Chicago from Carnegie. Nineteen company members (many of whom were also faculty members) resigned along with Stevens in support.<sup>501</sup>

Stevens' resignation came to be seen as a battle between the ideals of the Little Theatre movement and those of the commercial theatre.<sup>502</sup> Goodman company member Neal Caldwell was interviewed in the *New York Times*:

If the Goodman is going to turn commercial, I'd just as soon take my chances with Broadway, . . . I am sorry about the whole new policy. The others don't seem to realize we've tried all that. We were working definitely for a theatre and were just beginning to get there. We were working for the important plays. They want semi-important plays. They want a theatre that will please everybody. We were only trying to please ourselves. It is ironical that the Art Institute should take the art out of its theatre.<sup>503</sup>

---

<sup>500</sup> Newell 95.

<sup>501</sup> Jewett, Eleanor. "Facts Wanted on Goodman Row." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 22, 1930: 1. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>502</sup> Jewett, Eleanor. "A New Viewpoint on the Goodman Theater Row." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 6, 1930: 1. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>503</sup> "Neal Caldwell to Quit." *New York Times (1923-Current file)* June 2, 1930: 29. ProQuest. Web. 19 Jan. 2017.

Theatre critics and the public sided with Stevens and his company against the board of the Art Institute.<sup>504</sup>

The Board of the Art Institute tried to quell the outcry by restating “new” goals for the Goodman, which were basically the original goals for the theatre that Stevens had framed, and announced a series of guest artists.<sup>505</sup> Stevens had been head of both the professional company and the training program; under the new plan, his position was split between two people. Hubert Osborne, who had joined the Goodman as an associate producer in the fourth season, became head of the theatre company, and the directorship of the school was given to Maurice Gnesin.<sup>506</sup> The professional company had lost several members, as well as both subscribers and credibility. The following season was bolstered by guest stars Margaret Wycherly and Judith Lowry, but Newell notes that “the theatre deficit for 1930–31 was \$19,560.50 nearly half that of the theatre deficit for the entire five years under the management of T.W. Stevens.”<sup>507</sup> It was announced in May 1931 that the professional company would be discontinued, and the Goodman would operate as a training facility only.<sup>508</sup>

The Kenneth Sawyer Goodman Memorial Theatre and School of the Drama – intended as a

---

<sup>504</sup> Greene, Alexander. "The Goodman Argument." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 8, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>505</sup> Jewett, Eleanor. "Predicts Brilliant Goodman Future." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 15, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>506</sup> Newell 111.

<sup>507</sup> Newell 113; Jewett, "Predicts Brilliant Goodman Future."

<sup>508</sup> Collins, Charles. "Premiere with Extra Thrills at the Goodman." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Apr. 5, 1931: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018; Jewett, Eleanor. "Goodman Ready for Coming Season." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Aug. 31, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018; Collins, Charles. "Trustees Laud, End shows on Goodman Stage." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 1, 1931: 33. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

living memorial to a pillar of the art theatre community - lasted only five years at it was intended by Goodman's family, and envisioned by Stevens.<sup>509</sup>

The loss of the repertory company was seen as especially damaging to the non-commercial theatre movement: *Tribune* critic Eleanor Jewett said: "The atmosphere in the Goodman theatre the last five years was such as could not be duplicated in another theatre in the country."<sup>510</sup> Stevens largely avoided discussing his departure in the press, publishing one article that ran in *Theatre Arts Monthly* in January 1931. In it, he characterized the Goodman (and by extension, Chicago's) audience: "The audience, then, was one which came to see the play. It was an audience sufficiently theatre-conscious and art-conscious to take a chance in a theatre which openly belonged to the Art Institute, a civic and to some extent an educational agency."<sup>511</sup>

The Goodman continued as a training center under the leadership of Maurice Gnesin and David Itkin from 1931 until 1957.<sup>512</sup> The training program remained vital through the 1930s: by 1935 it was fully accredited and began to offer master's degrees in Directing and Design, and eventually an MFA in acting.<sup>513</sup> The school operated through World War II; although enrollment dropped, it benefitted from an influx of students attending on the GI bill following the war. By the early 1950s, there were over two hundred students in the program.<sup>514</sup> The Goodman turned out successful graduates: Karl Malden and Sam Wanamaker were

---

<sup>509</sup> Newell 90-1.

<sup>510</sup> Jewett, "Facts Wanted on Goodman Row;" "The Goodman Announces." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) June 15, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>511</sup> Stevens, Thomas Wood. "What the Audience Wants." *Theatre Arts Monthly*: Jan 1931: 61. Print. 61.

<sup>512</sup> "Acting School at Goodman." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Aug. 3, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>513</sup> Newell 126, 147.

<sup>514</sup> Newell 150.

students in the 1930s; Geraldine Page, Shelly Berman, and Jose Quintero were students in 1940s. Newell describes an institutional lethargy that seemed to come over the Goodman in the late 1940s, characterized by uninspired play choices, and unremarkable graduates. This became more pronounced in the 1950s, as the institution became even more hidebound and student aspirations seemed to shift. “Perhaps this change in direction was a result of a new type of student enrolling in the Goodman School of Drama, a student now interested in educational and community theatre. . .” rather than the professional stage.<sup>515</sup> As an institution, the Goodman became increasingly isolated from the rest of Chicago’s theatre scene during these years, producing graduates who promptly left the city to work in New York or Los Angeles upon graduation.

Student productions continued on the Goodman stage after the end of the repertory company, and audiences were drawn primarily from Art Institute members.<sup>516</sup> Critics no longer reviewed the plays.<sup>517</sup> The school produced between 6 and 8 shows per year through the 1950s. Season selections were unremarkable, and tended to be based on student’s educational needs. Newell characterizes them as “banal.”<sup>518</sup> One of the few noteworthy productions from this period occurred in 1932, when the Goodman produced *When Chicago Was Young* by Alice Gerstenberg and Herma Clark. The play focused on Chicago in the 1880s. It was a rare moment

---

<sup>515</sup> Newell 137.

<sup>516</sup> Wendt, Lloyd. “They Work at Playing.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 4, 1942: 1. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>517</sup> Newell 123.

<sup>518</sup> Newell 130.

of local relevance and civic pride in an institution that was in the process of disconnecting from the city's art scene entirely.<sup>519</sup>

One bright spot was the Children's Theatre program, which began under Thomas Wood Stevens and continued into the 1950s under the direction of Charlotte Chorpenning.<sup>520</sup> The Children's Theatre plays originally grew out of student classwork but soon developed into a four-show season. The program was popular because there was nothing else like it in Chicago at the time.<sup>521</sup> Locally, the idea of theatre for children began at the Chicago Little Theatre, with Ellen Van Volkenburg's puppet plays and continued with Alice Gerstenberg's work with the Junior League. While the Goodman ceased to operate as an art theatre by 1931, the idea of children's theatre remained a consistent and popular part of their public programming for decades; for many it no doubt became their first exposure to theatre. In this way, the Goodman played an important part in developing audiences in Chicago, even during the years in which the institution was widely viewed to be in serious decline.

In 1957, Maurice Gnesin died, and David Itkin retired. John Reich was hired as director, with the mission of reviving the institution.<sup>522</sup> Under his guidance, the Goodman began to revitalize the training program, and sought to reestablish a professional repertory theatre company. The Goodman's history after World War II will be covered in more detail later. In terms of the dispositions related to Off-Loop theatre, the Goodman is important because it was

---

<sup>519</sup> Cass, Judith. "'When Chicago was Young' Opens Tonight, Benefits Olivet." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 7, 1932: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>520</sup> Winn, Marcia. "Goodman Tries New Juvenile Drama Theory." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 11, 1935: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>521</sup> Cass, Judith. "Theater Series for Youngsters Proves Popular." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 6, 1943: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>522</sup> Newell 142.

a direct outgrowth of the early little theatre movement: it was founded to carry forward Kenneth Sawyer Goodman's ideals of non-commercial theatre and theatre education. This was initially insured by the fact that the institution was founded by his friend and mentor, Thomas Wood Stevens.<sup>523</sup> Stevens was experienced at creating theatre training programs, having come from Carnegie Institute, where he implemented the first undergraduate college program in theatre. Stevens created an integrated training program and professional art theatre ensemble that served as a model for others. Despite Stevens' best efforts, financial concerns and an unsympathetic institutional board proved to be the undoing of the original plan. However, in keeping with the idea of habitus, once a disposition is in place, it can always be reactivated. The "new" mission for the Goodman set forth by John Reich in the 1950s was really a return to the theatre's original purpose; to be a professional theatre company and a training program.

Stevens' ouster further demonstrated what the New Theatre and Donald Robertson's battles with the Chicago Theatre Society showed earlier: it was not enough for a non-commercial theatre to have an endowment or institutional support, a clear understanding and a separation between the artistic leadership and administration had to exist. While Stevens' efforts to establish an art theatre within the walls of the Art Institute were misunderstood by the very institution housing it, his exit did succeed in rallying the public: the outcry within the press and by the public at his resignation indicate that the Goodman had succeeded in garnering the support of the community at large.<sup>524</sup> Further, considering that it was the early

---

<sup>523</sup> "Thomas Stevens, Former Theater Director, Dies." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 30, 1942: 14. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>524</sup> Jewett, Eleanor. "Slants on Goodman Situation." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 13, 1930: 1. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

days of the depression, it is remarkable to think that nineteen other people followed Stevens out the door, into certain unemployment, echoing Alice Gerstenberg's revolt at the Chicago Little Theatre and the Hull-House Players attempted revolt in the 1910s. This speaks to the strength of the ensemble and the feeling of community, both within the Goodman, and outside the institution, in the community at large.<sup>525</sup> The Goodman under Stevens' gave us the dispositions of ensemble, community, and offered a model for non-commercial theatre production and theatre training. The on-going children's theatre program helped to build and foster audiences in the city of Chicago over the span of decades.

### **The Chicago Federal Theatre Project**

The national impact and importance of the Federal Theatre Project is well-known; this section will focus on Chicago's Federal Theatre Project as a part of the non-commercial theatre community. The Federal Theatre Project (FTP) was unlike other efforts covered so far in that it was fully professional, but non-commercial. The Federal Theatre Project was a national employment program for theatre professionals, i.e., those who had made their living in the commercial theatre prior to the depression.<sup>526</sup> It was not intended (or even allowed) to compete with commercial theatre; as a result, the FTP tended to look to experimental and educational theatre for production and programming models. The FTP is included in this study because it was non-commercial and experimental; additionally, it was also populist in its programming and local in its focus. Because it utilized experimental theatre techniques in its

---

<sup>525</sup> "Neal Caldwell, Former Actor at Goodman, is Dead." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 4, 1933: 14. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>526</sup> "Federal Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 27, 1935: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

storytelling and stagecraft, as it did with the Living Newspapers, the FTP helped bring alternative theatre to the general public. In this way, it helped to build a popular audience for experimental theatre, and this becomes one of the dispositions that contributed to the habitus of Off-Loop theatre.

The Federal Theatre Project began on August 27, 1935. Hallie Flanagan, former director of Vassar's Experimental Theatre, was appointed director.<sup>527</sup> The FTP was a branch of the Federal Arts Project, itself a program of the Works Progress Administration or WPA, enacted as part of President Roosevelt's New Deal.<sup>528</sup> The FTP was headquartered in Washington, DC, and administered throughout the rest of the country by regions: New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago were the three city-based centers, the rest of the nation was divided into South, East, West, and Mid-West regions.<sup>529</sup> Chicago was also headquarters for the FTP's Midwestern Play Bureau, headed by playwright Susan Glaspell.<sup>530</sup> The organizational and administrative challenges of starting the FTP were significant: although the program tends to be remembered as an arts project, it was intended as an employment program for commercial theatre workers. An entire bureaucracy needed to be created to support the FTP's activities, and like national director Flanagan, the first administrator of the Chicago FTP also came from educational

---

<sup>527</sup> "Four Are Named to Direct Arts Relief Program." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 27, 1935: 10. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018; "398,894 In WPA Grants to State Freed by M'Carl." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 18, 1935: 23. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>528</sup> Schmitt, Patrick. "The Chicago Federal Theatre Project: 1935-1939." MA Thesis. U of Illinois Chicago, 1978. Print. 14.

<sup>529</sup> Schmitt 15.

<sup>530</sup> Vactor, Vanita Marian. "A History of the Chicago Federal Theatre Project Negro Unit, 1935-1939." Diss. New York U, 1998. Print. 35.



theatre – Thomas Wood Stevens, formerly of the Goodman Theatre and the Carnegie Institute.<sup>531</sup>

Federal Theatre projects were organized as “units” that specialized in particular types of theatre: each unit operated along the lines of a traditional theatre ensemble, although some technical and production aspects such as costumes and scenery were centralized within a region. The Chicago project began in October 1935 with four units: the Experimental unit, the Americana unit – which did legitimate and traditional work, a Vaudeville unit, and the Negro unit, which had no particular specialization beyond the color of the performer’s skin.<sup>532</sup> A Children’s Theatre, Yiddish Theatre, and a Dance unit were added later. The Americana and Experimental units were later combined, and some productions drew performers from multiple units.<sup>533</sup> All told, the Chicago Federal Theatre project employed over 1000 people, and reached an audience of 4 million.<sup>534</sup>

Flanagan’s desire to create a “free, adult, uncensored” theatre using federal funds was controversial, and the FTP became a target for political opponents of Roosevelt’s New Deal programs, eventually leading to its defunding in June 1939.<sup>535</sup> Chicago’s FTP was often characterized as lacking the professionalism of the New York project; at the same time, it also ran with considerably less labor strife, and maintained better relationships with state WPA offices. The Chicago project experienced internal struggles, endured local censorship, and faced

---

<sup>531</sup> Schmitt 29; “Lasting Federal Aid Stage is Aim of New Dealers.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Dec. 31, 1935: 2. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>532</sup> Schmitt 27.

<sup>533</sup> Schmitt 35.

<sup>534</sup> Schmitt 98.

<sup>535</sup> Schmitt 27.

a hostile press - the politically conservative *Tribune* rarely missed an opportunity to present the FTP in a bad light. Despite all this, Schmitt notes that “Most importantly, the Chicago Project appears to have satisfied its audiences.”<sup>536</sup>

The Chicago unit was responsible for some of the Federal Theatre Project’s most significant work, including *Spirochete*, a living newspaper about syphilis, Theodore Ward’s African-American drama *Big White Fog*, and the musical *Swing Mikado*.<sup>537</sup> Vactor states, “In some ways, *Big White Fog* was the high point of the Chicago Project. The play is perhaps the best original work that came from the Chicago Federal Theatre.”<sup>538</sup> It is also significant that *Swing Mikado* and *Big White Fog* were productions that originated in Chicago’s Negro unit.

Although the Chicago FTP ran smoothly compared to New York, it went through three administrators in four years, and the changes in leadership reflect the emergence of differences in the way theatre is practiced in Chicago versus New York City. Thomas Wood Stevens, who helped establish art theatre in Chicago, designed the first degree-granting college theatre program at Carnegie Institute, then founded the Goodman Memorial Theatre, was the first administrator for the Chicago project. He established the first four Chicago units: the Experimental Theatre unit was created using members of the Oxford Players, a touring theatre group from University of Minnesota that had become stranded in Chicago by the depression;

---

<sup>536</sup> Schmitt 35.

<sup>537</sup> Collins, Charles. "Syphilis Story Well Told in a Good Drama." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Apr. 30, 1938: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>538</sup> Vactor 85.

the Americana unit did older plays by American playwrights; the Negro unit originally did “white” plays adapted for a black audience; and the Vaudeville unit performed in city parks.<sup>539</sup>

Stevens created the infrastructure of the FTP in Chicago: one issue he had to contend with was the relative lack of facilities.<sup>540</sup> Chicago had a considerably smaller professional theatre community and less production capacity than the New York City project. Schmitt notes that the consolidation of the professional theatre during the nineteenth century due to the Theatrical Syndicate had concentrated theatre performers and production facilities in New York. As a result, FTP projects located in other cities like Chicago faced challenges in having to train stage and technical workers and create production capacity.

The development of art theatres in urban centers other than New York City had repaired part of the damage done by the syndicates, but the small art theatres were not intended to substitute for fully-developed, thriving professional theatres. Consequently the various projects of the Federal Theatre outside of New York City had to develop their own resources and build new bases for theatrical production. This meant that the projects had to expand and improve their pools of talent, educate their audience, and, most importantly, to find ways in which to express the attitudes and sensibilities of the regions in which they

---

<sup>539</sup> Schmitt 30; Vactor 31; Collins, Charles. "Art Theater Troupe Opens Late in April." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Mar. 26, 1935: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018. The Vaudeville Unit predated the FTP – it was a continuation of a state work relief program.

<sup>540</sup> Schmitt 31.

were located. The Chicago Federal Theatre was perhaps one of the most successful projects outside of New York City in fulfilling these requirements.<sup>541</sup>

Stevens familiarity with Chicago ultimately benefitted the project: he knew that the FTP faced a press that was often hostile to the mission of Roosevelt's WPA program and critical of the idea of the government getting into show business.<sup>542</sup> He also knew that Chicago's city government presented unique challenges: Osborne states that Stevens took an intentionally conservative approach to selecting work as a result. National director Flanagan was unhappy with Stevens' conservatism, and the two subsequent directors of the Chicago unit produced edgier plays that, while it pleased Flanagan, also ran afoul of local authorities on at least two occasions.<sup>543</sup>

National director Flanagan was dissatisfied with Stevens. After a visit to Chicago, Vactor states that Flanagan determined that he had done an inadequate job organizing the Chicago unit, which culminated in his resignation.<sup>544</sup> Stevens was replaced by George Kondolf, who had a background as a producer in commercial theatre.<sup>545</sup> Kondolf combined the American and Experimental units into one entity, the Vaudeville unit moved from performing in city parks to performing an original show, *O Say Can You Sing?* at the Blackstone Theatre, and he organized the Yiddish, Children's Theatre, and Dance units.<sup>546</sup> It was felt that the overall quality of

---

<sup>541</sup> Schmitt 95-6.

<sup>542</sup> "Col. M'Cormick Hits New Deal at Philadelphia." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 18, 1935: 8. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018; Arthur, Sears H. "Satirical Show Hits New Deal: Chicago-Bound." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 25, 1935: 13. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018; "WPA Dramatic Project Woos College Stars." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 6, 1936: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>543</sup> Osborne 22.

<sup>544</sup> Vactor 30.

<sup>545</sup> Schmitt 32; "The Stage." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 1, 1936: 27. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>546</sup> Schmitt 32; Vactor 80; Collins, Charles. "Great Northern Theater Reopens with WPA Musical show." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 29, 1936: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

Chicago's productions improved under Kondolf, but his leadership was also problematic.

Flanagan investigated the progress of the Chicago unit under Kondolf and found that he had leased theatres that were sitting dark, that some units were unproductive, while others were over-budget.<sup>547</sup> Further, he brought a commercial theatre sensibility to the FTP; telling *Variety* that he wanted the Chicago FTP to compete openly with commercial theatre - which ran counter to the FTP's mission. He was transferred to head the New York Federal Theatre Project in March 1937.<sup>548</sup>

Harry Minturn became the third and final leader of Chicago's FTP. Minturn had run a stock company in Chicago in the 1920s, and had been working as a stage director for the Chicago FTP since the beginning of the project.<sup>549</sup> Minturn "redivided" the Americana and Experimental units, and returned the Vaudeville unit to performing in city parks: the free park performances were enormously popular and made FTP programs accessible to many people who would not venture downtown to see theatre. Minturn ran the Chicago project until Congress cut the funding for the entire Federal Theatre Project in June of 1939.<sup>550</sup> It is significant that Thomas Wood Stevens came from an educational theatre background, and that subsequent leaders of the Chicago project – Kondolf and Minturn – were from the commercial theatre. Once Stevens had built the organizational structure, a more commercial approach was possible. It is also significant that Stevens and Minturn were familiar with Chicago, while

---

<sup>547</sup> Vactor 30-1.

<sup>548</sup> Vactor 80.

<sup>549</sup> Osborne 15; "PWA Theater Unit Leases Blackstone for its Productions." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Feb. 12, 1936: 20. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018; "Minturn Named Director of WPA Stage Project." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 3, 1938: 19. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>550</sup> Schmitt 33.

Kondolf (and national director Flanagan) were not: Stevens got the FTP up and running, despite conflicts with Flanagan over “conservative” play selections. Stevens, and later Minturn, both being familiar with the Chicago habitus of their time, knew how to negotiate the landscape of the city’s theatre scene and make the FTP successful in a city with a corrupt city government and a hostile press.

The Chicago Negro Unit became a site innovation. When the Chicago project began, it inherited performers from a predecessor program of the Illinois Federal Emergency Relief Commission, who had been performing in city parks. Among this group were about thirty black performers, under the FTP, about twenty-five of them were assigned to the Negro unit, the rest went to the Vaudeville unit.<sup>551</sup> Unlike the other Chicago units, there was no clear vision as to what the Negro unit should do: FTP administrators could not think of black performance *outside* of Vaudeville, so the Negro unit became a default unit for African-American performers who qualified for relief as theatre workers, but did not “fit” in the Vaudeville unit. The unit was overstaffed, underfunded, and went through several changes of leadership in its early months.<sup>552</sup> Schmitt states that the Negro unit began by performing “traditional black entertainments”; melodramas which offered depictions of black life acceptable to white people. Richard Wright, who was part of Illinois Writers Project, as well as a publicist for the Negro unit, later said; “Contemporary plays dealing realistically with Negro life were spurned as being too controversial.”<sup>553</sup>

---

<sup>551</sup> Vactor 34.

<sup>552</sup> Vactor 41.

<sup>553</sup> Vactor 48.

The Negro unit went through several directors - most of whom were white; it was not until Shirley Graham, an African-American woman with a background in music education and college teaching, was appointed to the Negro unit by George Kondolf, that the unit found its artistic voice. Vactor writes that "Graham was the 6<sup>th</sup> director to work with the actors, and third project supervisor to manage the CNU company in less than a year."<sup>554</sup> She took charge of administration and play selection, and made an effort to develop relationships with Chicago's African-American community, revitalizing the company in the process.

The Negro unit first produced a black adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* - *Romey and Julie*. It was popular, if not critically well-received. Over two thousand people saw its eleven performances.<sup>555</sup> This was followed by *Did Adam Sin?*, a melodramatic morality play with gospel music. A production of *Everyman* in June 1936 featuring jazz music was plagued with difficulties, and proved unpopular with the press, audiences, and the FTP administration.<sup>556</sup> For their next production, the CNU selected Paul Green's *Hymn to the Rising Sun*, a serious social drama which depicted the brutality of life on a southern chain gang.<sup>557</sup> The play was cancelled on its opening night in October 1936 with three hundred people standing in the lobby of the Princess Theatre on Clark St.<sup>558</sup> The newspapers reported at the time that state WPA director Robert J. Dunham shut down the play due to content, stating, "It's of such a moral character that I can't even discuss it with a member of the press." Vactor states that it was actually the

---

<sup>554</sup> Vactor 60.

<sup>555</sup> Vactor 42.

<sup>556</sup> Vactor 47.

<sup>557</sup> Vactor 54.

<sup>558</sup> "Doubt Muddies Plans for WPA Play's Opening." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 11, 1936: 18. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

Mayor's office and the Chicago Police Department behind the cancellation, and the FTP preferred to have it appear that they cancelled the play themselves rather than have it shut down by local authorities.<sup>559</sup> The censorship was unique to Chicago: the New York Experimental unit produced *Hymn* in 1937 with no issues – it was the kind of situation that Thomas Wood Stevens managed to avoid during his tenure.<sup>560</sup>

The next show, *Mississippi Rainbow*, was most likely selected because it would offend no one. It was a three-act comedy, and featured original music by Shirley Graham, performed by a fifty-member choir. It was popular and well-received; but Vactor notes that the audience was ninety percent white.<sup>561</sup> Critics within the African-American community had suggested that the CNU produce the work of local black writers: finally taking the advice of the black community, the CNU produced *Big White Fog* by Theodore Ward. Ward was an actor with the CNU and tailored characters to specific actors in the company. A drama about a family struggling against economic and social oppression, the play was controversial not only in that it realistically depicted black urban life, but also presented socialism as the answer to the struggle for equality.<sup>562</sup> Schmitt notes that in the play, both capitalism and Black Nationalism are depicted as false answers, and the play's message is that only by uniting in socialist solidarity with white people can problems be overcome.<sup>563</sup> Vactor writes that beyond the politics, Ward had also depicted the internal problems of the black family. CNU director Graham had opposed

---

<sup>559</sup> Vactor 56; "WPA Puts Off Play's Opening a Second Time." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 15, 1936: 10. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>560</sup> Vactor 56-57.

<sup>561</sup> Vactor 77.

<sup>562</sup> Collins, Charles. "Drama Depicts Family Life of Chicago Negro." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Apr. 8, 1938: 16. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>563</sup> Schmitt 79.



the show, feeling that the African-American audience was not ready to accept communism as the solution to their problems.<sup>564</sup> Despite the controversy, *Big White Fog* was a hit, running a total of ten weeks before moving to another theatre for a week.<sup>565</sup> Schmitt notes that the black community eventually came to support the show, and notes, "In some ways, *Big White Fog* was the high point of the Chicago Project. The play is perhaps the best original work that came from the Chicago Federal Theatre."<sup>566</sup>

*Swing Mikado*, also originating in Chicago's Negro Unit, became one of the most successful FTP shows.<sup>567</sup> Inspired by Orson Wells and John Houseman's famous FTP production of *Voodoo Macbeth*, it is said that the Negro unit was intending to produce a traditional version of *Mikado*, when some of the actors in the production began to clown around during rehearsal and "swing" their music.<sup>568</sup> Chicago FTP director Minturn happened to drop by the rehearsal, liked what he heard, and took over directing the play.<sup>569</sup> *Swing Mikado* ran for twenty-two weeks at the Great Northern Theatre, and broke attendance records.<sup>570</sup> The production transferred to New York in March 1939, and ran for fifty-two performances.<sup>571</sup> Commercial theatre producers eventually took over the show, and it spawned an imitation, *Hot Mikado* starring Bill "Bojangles" Robinson.<sup>572</sup> The Negro Unit, created as an afterthought,

---

<sup>564</sup> Vactor 108.

<sup>565</sup> Schmitt 40; Vactor 114.

<sup>566</sup> Schmitt 85.

<sup>567</sup> "'The Mikado' Becomes Hit of the Season." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 1, 1939: 1. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>568</sup> Vactor 164.

<sup>569</sup> Vactor 166.

<sup>570</sup> Vactor 181.

<sup>571</sup> "'Mikado' Wages in New York to Top Equity Rate." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Feb. 19, 1939: 8. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>572</sup> Vactor 177.

became the creative engine of the Chicago Federal Theatre project. The work of the unit reinforced a disposition of the Off-Loop habitus, that great work can thrive on adversity and succeed in spite of neglect.

The Chicago Federal Theatre project ended in June 1939, when Congress cut off funding for the entire program.<sup>573</sup> Schmitt makes the case that the Chicago FTP helped professionalize Chicago theatre artists. Initially, the productions staged during the tenure of Stevens were seen as being amateurish and unprofessional. Under Kondolf, who came from the commercial theatre of New York, the professionalism increased. Finally, under Minturn, who was from Chicago's commercial theatre world, a balance was found between producing the kind of socially relevant work that Hallie Flanagan prized, at a higher professional standard. This incremental development helped improve the overall quality of artistry within the city.

Stevens' early imprint on the project helped disseminate the ethos of the art theater movement that Stevens was instrumental in creating at the beginning of the century. In order to qualify for the FTP, one had to have proof of employment in the professional theatre, which meant the commercial theatre. The FTP in many respects staged experimental theatre pieces using performers and designers from the commercial theatre. Additionally, because FTP shows were low cost or in some cases free, they put experimental theatre in front of a popular audience. In these ways, the FTP educated both artist and audiences in experimental theatre. The FTP also kept professional theatre alive in Chicago during the depression: at times, FTP

---

<sup>573</sup> Schmitt 21; Edwards, Willard. "Jolt Roosevelt; Curb WPA." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 17, 1939: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

shows were the only things running.<sup>574</sup> The Chicago project also, out of necessity, helped to train theatre workers and create support facilities for theatre, helping to build and strengthen the local theatre community.<sup>575</sup>

The Federal Theatre Project contributed to the dispositions of Off-Loop theatre by presenting serious, socially relevant work for a popular audience. The project also helped develop the Chicago audience by presenting work that was particularly relevant to them – *Big White Fog*, but also the Vaudeville unit's *O Say Can You Sing?* which satirized local politics and city life, can be read as a precursor to the work of the Second City.<sup>576</sup> The project also built and fostered the idea of ensemble, and helped to professionalize the practice of theatre in the city. The Chicago FTP helped to both professionalize and modernize Chicago's commercial theatre; through its reliance on "new stagecraft" techniques and focus on "problem" plays – particularly in the Living Newspapers, it offered an artistic alternative to commercial theatre, and did so for a popular audience. The changing leadership of the Chicago project – from Chicago educator Stevens to New York producer Kondolf to Chicago producer and director Minturn - shows evidence of a unique Chicago theatrical sensibility developing: theatre in Chicago is best done by people of Chicago.

### **Minnie Galatzer and The Actors Company**

Minnie Galatzer was an acting teacher and director whose career spanned from the 1930s into the late 1950s. She was the driving force behind the Actors Company of Chicago,

---

<sup>574</sup> "All Legitimate Theaters to be Dark Tonight." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 31, 1938: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>575</sup> Schmitt 70.

<sup>576</sup> "The Stage." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 25, 1936: 19. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

which was both the name of her theatre school, and the name under which she produced and directed what were often admiringly referred to in the press as “sub-professional,” “semi-professional” or “tributary” productions of contemporary plays. Galatzer’s school and ensemble were perhaps the most commercially-focused of the non-commercial theatre efforts going on in Chicago at the time; her play selections were often “recent Broadway successes” and tended heavily towards the noirish melodrama popular at the time.<sup>577</sup> As a director, Galatzer was frequently acclaimed for the fact that her amateur actors often gave professional-level performances. Sills summarizes the company as “A theatre company struggling to define itself as an amateur company with professional training and standards.”<sup>578</sup>

Galatzer is significant because she tried to establish a professional, Equity theatre company in Chicago. Her efforts ran up against the staid and often stagnant nature of the arts scene that prevailed in Chicago in the 1940s and 1950s: recall that this is the era that prompted A.J. Liebling to write *Chicago: The Second City*. Galatzer’s efforts to establish a professional theatre can be situated within a continuum that began with the art theatre/little theatre movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, that Donald Robertson envisioned with his idea of a “civic” theatre – a local, professional theatre ensemble. Galatzer is important in that she was the first to try to raise the status a local theatre company from amateur to professional, a narrative or scenario that becomes a part of the Off-Loop habitus.

Her multiple attempts to “Turn Equity” may be the fountainhead for what can be thought of as an addendum to the Steppenwolf Scenario: the “Turning Equity” Scenario. For an

---

<sup>577</sup> Sills 21.

<sup>578</sup> Sills 20.

ensemble or theatre company, “Turning Equity” means being able to hire Equity actors, pay union wages, and abide by union rules. For an ensemble, moving from non-Equity to Equity status is legitimizing: it is a sign of professionalism. However, the biggest obstacle is usually financial: a theatre company needs to be sufficiently solvent to issue paychecks to Equity members.<sup>579</sup> Galatzer’s struggle to move her company from non-Equity to Equity status may be the first instance of this scenario playing out in Chicago, and for this reason it contributes to the habitus of Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre – many others would enact this scenario in the 1970s. Galatzer was not successful, but kept trying – and this too is significant for the habitus.

Kathleen Sills’ dissertation *The Inside Track to the Future: Chicago Theater 1950 – 1970*, states that Galatzer began the Actors Company with students from classes she taught at the Jewish People’s Institute in the early 1930s, and in 1938 moved into a space in the Loop. Sills interviewed theatre historian Laurence Senelick, who had studied at Galatzer’s school as a child.<sup>580</sup> Senelick himself referred to his early studies with Galatzer in a 2004 piece that appeared in *Theatre Journal*.

...my mother enrolled me, aged nine, in classes at the Actors Company. This was a group located in the Loop near the Civic Auditorium, on the top floor of an office building, with its own proscenium theatre, scene shop, radio studio, offices, and rehearsal rooms. The artistic director, Minnie Galatzer, came out of the same Jewish immigrant leftist background as had the founders of the Group

---

<sup>579</sup> Playwrights Theatre Club in the 1950s – a forerunner of Second City – is often considered the first Off-Loop theatre to go Equity. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Playwright’s members may have started an Off-Loop theatre tradition: company members were often issued paychecks with the understanding that they would be “donated” back to the company, rather than cashed.

<sup>580</sup> Sills, Kathleen. "The Inside Track to the Future: Chicago Theater, 1950–1971." Diss. Tufts U, 2001. Print. 22.

Theatre; like them, she worshipped at the shrine of Stanislavsky. Although our acting classes covered such technical matters as voice, posture, and movement, they paid closest attention to improvisation and the attainment of “truth.”<sup>581</sup>

Galatzer was active in Chicago theatre between 1930 and 1958; despite a long career, there is little archival information available about her beyond her professional activities. She appears to have been raised in Chicago, and began her career in Jewish community theatre productions. A 1943 *Variety* article states that she was then twenty-eight years old, and had founded the company in 1930; “For three and a half years the outfit wrote, directed and produced its own radio show. In 1937 it operated a summer theatre at Beverly Shores, Ind. Later it built a small house of its own, which soon was outgrown and the company moved to Kimball Hall. Some of the actors have graduated to Hollywood.”<sup>582</sup> A 1947 *Variety* article describes Galatzer as “a former talent coach for Warner Bros.”<sup>583</sup> Given these indications – particularly her “Jewish immigrant leftist background,” it is possible that Galatzer may have had some connections to Hull-House’s theatre programs. Based on her fluency with Stanislavsky, Sills suggests that she may have had some training or connection to Russian émigré teacher Maria Lazareff, who taught at Hull-House from 1933 to 1954, but admits that there is no archival evidence of this.<sup>584</sup>

Galatzer’s school appears to have taught children and adults, and frequently offered public performances of student work. In addition to this, Galatzer staged full-scale productions

---

<sup>581</sup> “The Theatre Journal Auto/Archive: Laurence Senelick.” *Theatre Journal* 56.2 (2004): 341-349. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 19 Jan. 2017. 341.

<sup>582</sup> “Chicago Amateur Group Eyes Pro Set-Up; Seeks Angel With 10G for Reshuffle. *Variety* (Archive: 1905-2000) Sept. 11, 1943: 24. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>583</sup> “Chi Actors’ Group, 75-100G Backed to Try Pro Pose.” *Variety* (Archive: 1905-2000) Aug. 17, 1946: 42. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>584</sup> Sills 23.

with casts that consisted of what were likely her advanced adult students, and professionals - most notably, Arthur Peterson, who appeared on the radio soap opera *Guiding Light*.<sup>585</sup> Peterson taught acting at Galatzer's school and would become a producing partner with her in later endeavors. Galatzer's school, student productions and the "subprofessional" productions were all referred to as "The Actors Company of Chicago;" but only the "adult" productions were reviewed in the press. The conceptual line between professional vs. non-professional status continued to be blurry for the group, and can be seen as a defining struggle for Galatzer's efforts.

The school operated from 1938 until 1952 in various locations: notably the 218 S. Wabash building, which is evidently where Senelick studied.<sup>586</sup> The earliest press mentions suggest that the company began to stage performances in 1940, with an "unexpurgated" production of Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour*, which somehow managed to evade the local censorship that had cancelled another production of the play four years earlier.<sup>587</sup> Between 1940 and 1942, they staged Alexander Woollcott and George Kauffman's *The Dark Tower*, *Another Language* by Rose Franken, *Love for a Stranger* by Frank Vosper, and a revival of *The Children's Hour* on a bill with Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine*. These shows were not reviewed by the *Tribune*, no doubt because they were considered amateur theatre productions. This changed beginning in June of 1942, with *Letters to Lucerne* by Fritz Rotter and Allen

---

<sup>585</sup> Peterson is best known for playing "the Major" on the TV sitcom *Soap* in the 1970s.

<sup>586</sup> "Drama School Takes Space in Loop Building." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Nov. 16, 1947: SWB. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018; "Display Ad 151 -- No Title." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Apr. 7, 1946: D5. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018; "Stage Notes." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Oct. 27, 1958: C19. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>587</sup> "Order Deletions If 'Children's Hour' is to Play." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Jan. 12, 1940: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018; "The Stage." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Jan. 3, 1940: 19. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

Vincent, an allegorical war drama set at a girl's boarding school in Switzerland at the outbreak of the war in Europe.

The production generated a great deal of attention, due as much to the timely nature of the subject matter as to the fact that it marked the acting debut of local nightclub entertainer Winnie Hoveler. It was the first Actors Company production to be reviewed by the *Tribune*, and critic Cecil Smith's assessment indicates that the production succeeded on its own merits:

The blossoming Actors Company of Chicago, whose production of "The Children's Hour" aroused unqualified enthusiasm last spring, have now made another important contribution to the theater life of Chicago. (...) The present production is skillful and full of illusion, to the point that it will not disappoint those who demand a fully professional standard of performance. (...) Minnie Galatzer's direction is superbly apt and complete.<sup>588</sup>

A review in *Variety* concurred, and made note of the fact that the cast included several radio actors.<sup>589</sup> Their presence in the cast, along with local celebrity Hoveler, no doubt helped to elevate the group's perceived status above that of amateur to "semi-pro."<sup>590</sup>

*Letters to Lucerne* was followed by a production of John Steinbeck's *The Moon Is Down* in August 1942. Cecil Smith of the *Tribune* again praised Galatzer's work saying, "...the gifted director of the company, proved her skill in fusing a mixed company of professional and

---

<sup>588</sup> Smith, Cecil. "Actors Group Deals Expertly with War Play: 'Letters to Lucerne.'" *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) July 6, 1942: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>589</sup> S.H. "Chi Actors Open Week-End Series." *Variety* (Archive: 1905-2000) July 18, 1942: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>590</sup> S.H. "Chi Actors Open Week-End Series."



subprofessional actors into a convincing artistic unison” but found the script dull, concluding his review with “A failure, yes, but an honorable failure.”<sup>591</sup> However, a week later, Smith walked back his earlier dismissal of the show:

After I had reported rather dismally upon the opening performance, I was a bit startled to see how much Claudia Cassidy liked it, and more than a bit startled to discover her admiration for John Steinbeck’s understanding of people. I thought that the central inadequacy of “The Moon is Down” lay in Mr. Steinbeck’s preoccupation with ideas and broadly symbolic, yet tersely epigrammatic episodes which had too little real flesh and blood in them. For the sake of the deserving Actors’ Company of Chicago, I hope that audiences will find me wrong, and counterbalance my disillusioned reaction with enthusiastic word of mouth praise for Minnie Galatzer’s excellently directed performance.”<sup>592</sup>

Smith’s qualification of his earlier statements reads like an apology for a bad review, and shows a willingness on the part of a Chicago theatre critic to foster the efforts of a group of well-meaning local artists, a pattern that would emerge in the 1970s between Richard Christiansen and the Steppenwolf company. Smith was unfailingly complimentary of Galatzer as a director in subsequent reviews.<sup>593</sup>

---

<sup>591</sup> Smith, Cecil. “Moon Is Down’ Rated Failure, but with Honor.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Aug. 8, 1942: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>592</sup> Smith, Cecil. “Theatrical Producing Company to Be Formed in Milwaukee.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Aug. 16, 1942: F. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018. Claudia Cassidy was a legendarily harsh critic.

<sup>593</sup> Smith, Cecil. “Trick Ending Is Too Late to Save Comedy.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 8, 1942: 22. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018; Smith, Cecil. “Life and Zest in Play About Drama Critic.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 19, 1942: 23. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018; Smith, Cecil. “Chicago Cast’s ‘Guest in the House’ is a Hit.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 8, 1943: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

In July 1943, the company presented *Guest in the House*, by Hagar Wilde and Dale Eunson at Kimball Hall, a 500-seat concert hall at 25 W. Jackson. The article announcing the show states that the group intended to turn professional shortly.<sup>594</sup> A week later, more details emerged; the company expected to operate on an Equity contract in the fall. “Between now and next fall, however, Miss Galatzer will operate her theatre on a strictly amateur basis – amateur, that is, in everything except the wisdom and pointedness of her own stage direction.”<sup>595</sup> Smith characterized *Guest in the House* as “an arresting and novel psychological melodrama” and it proved to be a hit during the summer of 1943, running for nearly four months. The tagline “Longest Run of an Amateur company in American Theatre History” was used in ads for the show.<sup>596</sup> It was eventually required to close in late September because Kimball Hall was booked for the concert season.

In September 1943, *Variety* reported on the “amazing success” of the amateur company and their attempts to become a fully professional group: “For some time the company had been operating with both amateurs and pros, but last winter Equity and AFRA forbade their members to perform gratis with the technically amateur company.” The company was actively seeking backers and “angels” to help them become “a professional civic theater.”<sup>597</sup> The group’s hiatus during the winter of 1942 was likely the result of issues with the unions; radio actor Arthur Peterson had appeared in the title role in the play *Jason* in November 1942; he

---

<sup>594</sup> “Notes and News from the Theater World.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) June 20, 1943: E7. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>595</sup> Smith, Cecil. “‘Junior Miss’ Returns to Erlanger Theater Tonight: Prices Reduced.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) June 27, 1943: E2. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>596</sup> “Display Ad 38 -- No Title.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Sept. 5, 1943: E2. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>597</sup> “Chicago Amateur Group Eyes Pro Set-Up; Seeks Angel With 10G for Reshuffle.” *Variety* (Archive: 1905-2000) Sept. 11, 1943: 24. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

was not in the cast of *Guest in the House*, although he continued to be involved teaching at the school.<sup>598</sup>

*Variety* reported that Galatzer and her company had struggled to procure backing before opening *Guest in the House* as a professional production, but decided to open the show as a “fully amateur” effort. It was hoped that the success of the amateur show would allow the group to turn Equity. *Variety* reported that the company was putting aside profits of \$100 to \$200 each week towards establishing itself as a “commercial civic theater.” “To make the transformation requires \$10,000 but the company hopes that in the meantime an angel will appear.”<sup>599</sup> In late September, the *Tribune* reported that the group was moving:

They have taken over Forester theater on North Dearborn street and on Oct. 18 will move in to establish the Actors Company Creative theater, which is a fairly highfalutin name for an amateur group where a maximum of 30 apprentices will be accepted for free training each year, and where Miss Galatzer hopes to create a source of theater talent in all branches which will help sustain the professional civic theater still the group’s major aim.<sup>600</sup>

*Out of This World* by Nellise Child opened at the Forester in November 1943. Another war-themed play, *Variety* called it “...a dull, tedious fantasy that winds up very incoherently.”<sup>601</sup> It was followed by two other productions: Sidney Howard’s *They Knew What They Wanted* in

---

<sup>598</sup> Smith, Cecil. “Life and Zest in Play About Drama Critic.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Nov. 19, 1942: 23. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>599</sup> “Chicago Amateur Group Eyes Pro Set-Up; Seeks Angel With 10G for Reshuffle.”

<sup>600</sup> “Notes of the Theater.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Sept. 26, 1943: E4. ProQuest Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>601</sup> Morgi. “Plays Out of Town: Out of this World.” *Variety* (Archive: 1905-2000) Nov. 24, 1943: 62. ProQuest. Web. 22 May 2018.

January 1944, and *Female Wanted*, a “mystery melodrama” by John Houston and Griff Morris in April. Neither of these shows were reviewed, which may indicate that the group had not succeeded in going Equity. The Forester, now the Ruth Page Center for the Arts, may have been considered a less-than-ideal location for the ensemble because it was located outside of the Loop. It is likely that World War II impacted class enrollment and ticket sales - there is no mention of the Actors Company school or ensemble between April 1944 and November 1945, when the school began to run advertisements in the *Tribune*, listing an address of 64 W. Dearborn. In 1947, it was announced that the Actors Company school of drama and dance had leased the ninth and tenth floors of the 218 S. Wabash building.<sup>602</sup>

In June of 1946, the company did a summer theatre season in suburban Riverside, IL, and in August, *Variety* again announced that the company had secured backing of “between \$75,000 and \$100,000” and would soon be turning professional.<sup>603</sup> Seven months later, they opened Arthur Laurent’s *Home of the Brave* at the Eleventh Street Theatre; Arthur Peterson’s appearance in the show suggests that this was an Equity production. *Tribune* critic Claudia Cassidy savaged it in her review, calling it sentimental, hysterical, and maudlin.<sup>604</sup> The Actors Company does not appear to have attempted another professional production after *Home of the Brave*. The school closed in 1952, and Galatzer was mentioned as teaching acting at a

---

<sup>602</sup> “Drama School Takes Space in Loop Building.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 16, 1947: SWB. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>603</sup> “Chi Actors’ Group, 75-100G Backed to Try Pro Pose.” *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)* Aug. 17, 1946: 42. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>604</sup> Cassidy, Claudia. “On the Aisle: Actors Company Stages ‘Home of the Brave.’” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 6, 1947. ProQuest. Web. 22 May 2018.

summer theatre in Michiana Shores, IN.<sup>605</sup> She directed plays for community theatre groups in the early 1950s, and a 1953 article in the *Chicago Defender* names her as the director of a “dramatics art recital” at the Fine Arts Building.<sup>606</sup>

In 1954, Galatzer and Peterson partnered to present an outdoor summer theatre season at New Salem State Park in central Illinois; Peterson produced and Galatzer directed E.P. Conkle’s *Prologue to Glory*, about the early life of Abraham Lincoln.<sup>607</sup> In 1958, Peterson and Galatzer again partnered to form a professional company, American Cavalcade Theater, billed as “Chicago’s first professional off-Broadway theater....”<sup>608</sup> They presented Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* at the Eleventh Street Theatre, with the intention of running it “...for as long as traffic bears.”<sup>609</sup> Claudia Cassidy disliked both the script and the production, “The performance under Minnie Galatzer’s direction ranged from competent to subprofessional.”<sup>610</sup> It is interesting to note that fifteen years earlier, another critic had used “subprofessional” as a compliment.

*Variety*’s review of the show, which appeared on December 3, captures both the state of Chicago’s theatre scene in the late 1950s, and the challenges of trying to form a professional theatre production in Chicago at the time:

---

<sup>605</sup> “Other 22 -- No Title.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 27, 1958: C19. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018; Lynch, Agnes. “Lovers of Arts Find Haven in Dunes Colony.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Aug. 10, 1952: S4. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

<sup>606</sup> “Two Wilmette Groups to Give Play Four Times.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Feb. 22, 1953: N9. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018; “Sisterhoods Plan Annual Torah Fete.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 10, 1953: F6. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018; “Photo Standalone 31 -- No Title.” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)* July 4, 1953: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018; “Cantor to Take Lead Role in ‘Jazz Singer.’” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Feb. 11, 1954: N2. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>607</sup> “The Theatre Journal Auto/Archive: Laurence Senelick.” 341.

<sup>608</sup> “Other 22 -- No Title.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 27, 1958: C19. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

<sup>609</sup> Brown, Les. “Legitimate: Do-it-Yourself Trend in Chi Legit; Windy City Intelligentsia ‘Starved’ for Plays Not Blatantly Slick.” *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)* Nov. 5, 1958: 71, 76. *ProQuest*. Web. 19 Jan. 2017.

<sup>610</sup> “Group Opens Season with ‘Crucible.’” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 19, 1958: B9. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

With Chicago being by-passed by many of the serious touring shows, the local legit public has been awaiting with some concern the opening of a new stage venture, the American Cavalcade Theatre. This is taken as a test of whether the Windy City is ready for an off-Broadway sort of operation.

A complicating factor in the situation is that the Cavalcade has rather skimpy financing, so it probably couldn't survive an outright flop for its initial production. Thus, the fate of the whole project appears to hang on Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" opened last Tuesday.

On that basis, the answer would appear to be conjectural. The play, never presented here before, is wordy and one-dimensional, and although the production is not a dud, it is hardly calculated to arouse enthusiasm. However, Miller's other plays have been good draws here, and Windy City stage buffs are reputedly starved for serious drama.<sup>611</sup>

*Variety* was correct that the company could not survive a flop; *The Crucible* was their only production. It is not known what became of Galatzer after *The Crucible*; there are no further mentions of her in the press. Her efforts are noteworthy in that it was, as Sills notes, "one of the only theaters of this period that eventually sought to legitimize its existence as professional."<sup>612</sup>

---

<sup>611</sup> Les. "Legitimate: Stock Review - the Crucible." *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)* Dec. 3, 1958: 90. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

<sup>612</sup> Sills 20.

One reason the Actor's Company may have struggled was that the school and the performance ensemble used the same name. Galatzer's marketing only added to the confusion of school and ensemble: *Out of This World* was reported to be the "93d play for the group under the direction of Minnie Galatzer."<sup>613</sup> Undoubtedly, this figure included student performances, but it is indicative of the blurring that occurred in the public mind regarding what was professional and amateur, and may help explain why the Actors Company could never quite shed the perception that it was an amateur company. Despite this, Galatzer is to be admired for her determination – her group made at least three very public attempts to "turn Equity," only to find that Chicago was not ready to support a home-grown professional theatre company, a point with which Sills concurs. Galatzer's school certainly built a creative community and trained a generation of theatre artists, including Laurence Senelick and Abena Joan Brown, founder of ETA Creative Arts, but the city itself was not yet ready to commit to or fully embrace a home-grown professional theatre company.<sup>614</sup>

The era of the Actors Company (and later American Cavalcade Theatre) spans a period in which concepts and terminology such as "Art Theatre," "Little Theatre," and "Community Theatre" were evolving and developing towards the currently-held ideas regarding non-commercial, non-profit theatre: terminology such as "civic theatre," "non-profit" and "off-Broadway" enter into the press coverage of the Actors Company. Sills states that the American

---

<sup>613</sup> "Notes of the Theatre." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923 – 1963) Oct. 31, 1943: 1. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>614</sup> Roy, Rob. "Joan Phillips Brown One of Top Prospects in Local Drama Setup." *Daily Defender (Daily Edition)* (1956-1960) Sept. 29, 1959: 17. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.

Cavalcade Theatre was perhaps the first company to use the term “Off-Loop” to describe itself, citing the 1958 program note for their production of *The Crucible*.

...the goal for this first professional “off-Loop” theater in Chicago will be to present professional talent in quality productions for the great enjoyment, understanding and appreciations of the theater arts. These productions will be patterned after the successful operation of many of New York’s “Off-Broadway” companies.<sup>615</sup>

Galatzer and the Actors Company are significant because, as Kathleen Sills suggests, they may be the first instance of an amateur company in Chicago attempting to “turn Equity.”

Galatzer seemed to operate from a very “commercial” mindset: her play selection was based on Broadway, she had ties to professional actors like Peterson who worked in radio, and her work was frequently covered in *Variety*. Her early efforts to form a professional company appear to have been based on a for-profit model, and she ran afoul of Equity rules early on by combining professional and amateur actors (and probably not paying either). She seems to have been adept at making a virtue of necessity, however, billing the production of *Guest in the House* as “fully amateur.” As the possibility of non-commercial, non-profit organizational models evolved in the 1950s, she adopted them. The American Cavalcade effort in 1958 seems to have been modeled on lessons learned from regional theatre companies. She adapted to evolving conditions within the field, but her goal all along was to establish a professional theatre company. Unlike other non-commercial theatre groups at the time, she was not

---

<sup>615</sup> Sills 21.



concerned with developing new playwrights, serving a social mission, or reforming or uplifting the audience: she wanted to direct a professional theatre ensemble. Whether or not it was for-profit or non-profit was secondary. Her commercial approach and professional orientation brought new dispositions into the habitus of Chicago theatre, and her experiences with trying to turn Equity become common narratives in the Off-Loop era.

Chicago was not ready to support Galatzer's professional theatre ensemble in the 1940s and 1950s – the next chapter details the development of an audience for regional theatre in Chicago. Her motivations for wanting to establish a professional company in Chicago are unclear: whether this was a deep commitment to the city – as it was for Alice Gerstenberg – or that she was limited to Chicago by family ties or something else and tried to make the best of it – are not known. What history shows is that Galatzer spent nearly twenty-five years teaching, directing, and attempting to build a Chicago-based professional theatre ensemble, and that sort of determination is also a disposition of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre habitus.

## **Conclusion**

In some respects, Chicago's non-profit, non-commercial theatre scene was on life-support between the wars. The sense of community that seems to have existed during the art theatre/little theatre era evaporated. Rather than many small groups interacting, the era between the wars is about larger institutions. The focus of the individual groups can generally be characterized as attempts to build the city's artistic capacity – to train artists and audiences and create institutions and means of support for them. The non-profit, non-commercial theatres tended to be more democratic; they were no longer simply artistic outlets for the

social elite, as the city's art theatre scene prior to World War I was often perceived to be. The idea of theatre as high art rather than base entertainment came to be generally accepted, and the Federal Theatre Project in particular exposed a broad audience to new types of plays and staging. The dispositions that contributed towards Off-Loop theatre developed apace: ensemble remained important, and in this era, Viola Spolin began to formulate her ideas on improvisational games. The idea of theatre as a way of creating community was demonstrated at Hull-House, in the Federal Theatre Project, and with Alice Gerstenberg's popular pieces *When Chicago Was Young* and *Port of Chicago*. An important aspect of this era is the fact that the efforts at education – through the Goodman Theatre training program, Gerstenberg's Playwrights Theatre, and Galatzer's Actors Company school – were also attempts at building a community of professional artists in and of the city. While this did not pay off immediately, the desire to create a professional theatre or theatre scene in Chicago was set in place, and would begin to bear fruit in the 1960s.

The "vital arrogance" quality of Chicago's theatre develops further in this period: with the outcry surrounding Thomas Wood Stevens ouster from the Goodman in 1930, the resignations of theatre staff at Hull-House in 1941; the turnover in the leadership of Chicago's Federal Theatre Project. A habitus was developing for theatre in Chicago: a focus on ideals, ensemble, a sense of solidarity, community, also a sense (in the case of the Federal Theatre Project leadership) that Chicago has its own way of doing things: what works elsewhere (specifically New York) is not always right for us. A local identity was evolving.

## CHAPTER 4: WORLD WAR II – 1968

Between the end of World War II and the 1968 Democratic National Convention, existing dispositional elements strengthen, new dispositions emerge and evolve, and external conditions alter significantly and culminate in the emergence of a theatre culture unique to Chicago. A perception existed – even by people within the alternative theatre scene in Chicago at the time - that before 1968, there was nothing.<sup>616</sup> Writer A.J. Liebling lived in Chicago in 1949 and 1950; in 1952, he parlayed this experience into a series of essays for the *New Yorker*, which later became the book *Chicago: The Second City*. In it, Chicago is portrayed as a dull, gray place lacking culture in general, and theatre in particular. That “Second City” became the name of Chicago’s influential improvisational comedy theatre in 1959 shows the impact this idea of Chicago as a theatrical backwater had. Conversely, it also demonstrates the effort to transcend it; adopting “Second City” as the name of the group was a way to signal that we revel in an underdog status, that being “second” allows a certain freedom and creative license.<sup>617</sup> The theatrical narrative of the years between the end of the war and the beginning of the Off-Loop theatre scene are about overcoming this perception, for both Chicago theatre artists and audiences. Chicago had to prove to itself that the nation’s second city could and should have first rate theatre.

Chicago’s professional theatre scene after World War II was entirely dependent on Broadway, whose long decline had rapidly accelerated due to competition from film and

---

<sup>616</sup> Leonard, William. "3 New Theaters Display Wares." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 5, 1969: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

<sup>617</sup> For evidence of Chicago’s love of an underdog, one need look no further than the Chicago Cubs and the 108-year gap between World Series championships.

television. By 1950, this situation was not unique to Chicago, as Gerald Berkowitz notes in *New Broadways: Theatre Across America 1950 – 1980*:

With some significant exceptions, theatre outside New York - indeed, outside that square mile of Manhattan - consisted essentially of amateur and student groups, road companies and summer stock revivals of Broadway hits and, in a narrow corridor of northeastern cities, pre-Broadway tryouts. The vital center of the American theatre, the source of its dramatic literature and its acting and production styles, and the home (or goal) of its most talented actors, directors, composers and designers was Broadway.<sup>618</sup>

As commercial theatre struggled, alternatives to it emerged, and the Off-Broadway, Off-Off-Broadway and regional theatre movements had an impact on theatre in Chicago. The way these external developments manifested and were negotiated within and around Chicago's alternative and non-commercial efforts led to the city's Off-Loop scene.

Following World War II, Chicago's home-grown, non-profit, non-commercial theatre scene was small: it consisted of the Goodman, which had shed its professional company in the 1930s and was at that point operating as an educational theatre, Minnie Galatzer's struggling Actors Company, and – as Berkowitz noted - several amateur and community theatre groups. Chicago remained a production center for radio after the war, which helped to anchor a community of professional actors in the city, but with the transition to television in the 1950s, production gradually moved to the west coast. Chicago's community of professional actors

---

<sup>618</sup> Berkowitz, Gerald M. *New Broadways: Theatre Across America, 1950-1980*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982. Print. 1.

who primarily worked in radio, such as Arthur Peterson and others who had worked with Galatzer's company, soon left town.

The non-commercial theatre efforts in the period between the end of World War II and the beginning of the Off-Loop theatre scene in 1968 is characterized on the one hand by efforts that use the Off-Broadway theatre movement as a point of reference, and on the other by attempts to establish a regional theatre, which use the Guthrie Theatre of Minneapolis as their model. The Off-Broadway-based efforts are best exemplified by the early work of Second City founder Paul Sills' Playwrights Theatre Club in the early 1950s, the revival of Hull-House Theatre programs under director Robert Sickinger in the 1960s, and the work of June Pyskacek with Chicago City Players and later Kingston Mines. These efforts provided an operational and aesthetic model for the later Off-Loop theatre movement, and trained many of the actors, directors, and playwrights who would lead the Off-Loop theatre movement. Attempts to establish a non-profit regional theatre in Chicago along the lines of Minneapolis' Guthrie Theatre were exemplified by the efforts of the Goodman Theatre under director John Reich to return to professional status in the 1960s, and by the 1966 "Program for the Arts in Chicago" proposal put forth by the Mayor's Committee for Economic and Cultural Development. These initiatives were significant in that they engaged and energized the city's political and philanthropic leaders towards supporting professional theatre in the same fashion as the opera, symphony, and Art Institute. Their contribution to the habitus of Off-Loop theatre is that they prepared the city's donor class to become engaged in the Off-Loop theatre scene as supporters and subscribers in the next decade. In the case of the Goodman, an administrative and institutional structure was put back in place which allowed later artistic directors to capitalize

on the artistic ferment happening in the Off-Loop theatre scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

### **Mayor Daley and the City That Works**

Chicago's post-war history is dominated by Mayor Richard J. Daley. Perhaps Chicago's most powerful mayor, he built the modern city of Chicago. Under his leadership ". . . Chicago's superlative institutions - O'Hare International Airport, the world's busiest; Sears Tower, the world's tallest; and the Dan Ryan Expressway, the world's widest" were all built. Daley also built the University of Chicago Circle Campus, McCormick Place, and the Civic Center (now known as Daley Center).<sup>619</sup> Daley was first elected Mayor in 1955, and held the job until his death in 1976.<sup>620</sup> "Da Mare," as he was affectionately known, was far from charismatic; his appeal lay in the fact that he shared the sensibilities of his constituents - he was an Irish Catholic guy from the southside neighborhood of Bridgeport who continued to reside in the same modest bungalow his entire life.<sup>621</sup> Daley provided a sense of stability and control in the city at a time when these qualities were in short supply:

During an age correctly characterized by the book title, *The Ungovernable City*, Daley projected and often lived up to the image of an in-charge leader whose firm hand on the throttle permitted only orderly and slow change, if it permitted change at all. This effort to slow change to a manageable and controllable pace had a deep and profound appeal to Chicagoans. Chicago voters, who were

---

<sup>619</sup> Cohen, Adam and Elizabeth Taylor. *American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard J. Daley: His Battle for Chicago and the Nation*. Boston: Little, Brown, 2000. Print. 10.

<sup>620</sup> Cohen and Taylor 115.

<sup>621</sup> Cohen and Taylor 125.

heavily Catholic, “corporate” in social outlook, ethnic, blue-collar and often hard-hat in occupation, and conservative, were deeply troubled by the long-haired leaders of an ill-mannered generation that ridiculed their occupations, their religion, their politics, and their lifestyles – and, furthermore threatened the existing order of things.<sup>622</sup>

With the notable exception of the 1968 Democratic convention, Chicago did not experience the same level of civil unrest and capital flight that plagued other major cities in the 1960s and 1970s. While Daley and his administration had many faults - corruption and racism being high on the list - he was also noted for having a deep and direct connection to his public: “Daley had an immensely personal concern with the city, extending from everything: from individuals – it’s said that he knew half of the city’s forty thousand workers personally – to keeping the city clean and attractive.”<sup>623</sup>

What Daley lacked in personal appeal, he more than made up for in overall effectiveness. The famous “Daley Machine” was a political organization run on patronage, with city jobs and political favors the reward for loyalty to the Democratic party on election day. For much of his time in office, he was both Mayor of Chicago as well as chair of the Cook County Democratic Party organization. As “Party Boss,” he had significant influence over both city and county government, the park district, forest preserve district, and the school system.<sup>624</sup> The Daley Machine was responsive to those who supported it politically, and persisted because it

---

<sup>622</sup> Holli, Melvin G. "Political Equilibrium and the Daley Eras in Chicago." *Continuity* 23.1 (1999): 83-96. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 27 Dec 2017. 87.

<sup>623</sup> Siegel, Fred. "Mayors and Morality: Daley and Lindsay Then and Now." *Partisan Review* 68.2 (2001): 218-227. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017. 221.

<sup>624</sup> Miranda, Rowan A. "Post-Machine Regimes and the Growth of Government: A Fiscal History of the City of Chicago, 1970." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 28.3 (1993): 397 – 422. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017. 397.

worked: everyone got something – a city job, a liquor license, a streetlight repaired – in exchange for loyalty to the Democratic machine at the polls. Daley's hold on political power, combined with his love for the city, not only kept Chicago functioning in an era when other major cities were experiencing civil strife, economic disinvestment, and "white flight," but the image of Chicago as "the city that works" was created and promoted under Daley. In *American Pharaoh*, authors Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor credit Daley with fostering a civic renaissance unusual for its time:

Chicago was not the only American downtown to boom in the post-war years, but it was one of the few in the northern Rust Belt whose fortunes were rising. What prevented Chicago from going the way of Cleveland and Buffalo? Much of the credit lies with Daley's aggressive program for downtown redevelopment. Beginning with the 1958 plan, Daley declared his intention to put the full power of his office behind Loop redevelopment. And he did a masterful job of keeping all of the key constituencies in place. His strong working relationships with the city's business leaders kept them invested in the city, and helped persuade them to build and expand in the Loop. His close ties to the city's major unions were a key factor in the years of labor peace that prevailed in the city. And his influence in Washington and Springfield brought in millions of dollars to fund urban renewal projects that benefitted the central business district.<sup>625</sup>

---

<sup>625</sup> Cohen and Taylor 376.



Cohen and Taylor further credit Daley with restoring a sense of confidence in the city, coming into power at a time when the famous optimism of the city's motto "I Will" seemed to ring hollow for many Chicagoans.

The Daley administration is often remembered negatively due to its corruption, but a 1993 article by Rowan A. Miranda supports the argument that Chicago's Democratic Machine enabled the city to remain functional at a time when other American cities, specifically New York, were becoming unmanageable, and I contend this directly contributed to the evolution of the Off-Loop theatre scene. Miranda defines the "Strong Party Organization" (or SPO) theory of urban fiscal politics; "Cities governed by SPOs are better able to maintain fiscal discipline (i.e., curtail the growth of government spending) because SPOs are less responsive to the demands of prospending interest groups."<sup>626</sup> SPOs, such as the Daley Machine, work by overcoming the social fragmentation within a city; replacing divisions of race, ethnicity, class, special interests and geography with the "informal centralization" of the political party. The Machine unites factions which would otherwise be fragmented by special interests into one bloc, and survives by serving their interests. This is demonstrably true in Chicago; spending remained relatively steady under Mayor Daley and his immediate successor Michael Bilandic, then increased sharply under Mayors Jane Byrne and Harold Washington as the Daley Machine fell apart.<sup>627</sup> Machine-style politics are not unique to Chicago, but the system persisted much longer in Chicago than in Boston or New York.<sup>628</sup> New York City's machine politics broke down

---

<sup>626</sup> Miranda 398.

<sup>627</sup> Miranda 405.

<sup>628</sup> Miranda 400-1.

in 1958.<sup>629</sup> In keeping with Miranda's "SPO" theory, spending in New York increased exponentially through the 1960s and early 1970s, creating a debt that culminated in New York City's 1975 bankruptcy, which led to a steep decline in city services, safety, and overall quality of life.<sup>630</sup>

The fact that Machine politics persisted in Chicago into the mid-1970s is a significant factor that kept the city functional and livable, particularly for low-income residents, while New York City in the late 1960s and early 1970s was becoming dangerous, expensive and unwelcoming, particularly for the poor. I would include young actors, directors, designers and playwrights in that population, and attribute Chicago becoming a destination for young theatre artists in the 1970s and 1980s in part to New York's economic and civic decline. One of the most noteworthy results of New York's 1975 bankruptcy was a financial austerity program known as "planned shrinkage" which drastically cut back on regular trash collection, street maintenance, police and fire protection to poor neighborhoods. Roger Starr, chief of New York's Housing and Development Administration at the time, stated that the purpose was, in part, to ". . . reverse the role of the city. . . it can no longer be the place of opportunity."<sup>631</sup> In *The Assassination of New York*, Robert Fitch makes a compelling case that New York City's problems were created by urban planners and real estate developers; through the 1960s and into the 1970s, the city had pushed out manufacturing and transportation-related industries in favor of high-end housing developments and office buildings. The resulting disappearance of blue-collar jobs set off an economic and social chain reaction: the loss of manufacturing jobs led

---

<sup>629</sup> Fitch, Robert. *The Assassination of New York*. London: Verso, 1993. Print. 131.

<sup>630</sup> Miranda 402.

<sup>631</sup> Fitch viii.

to job loss in other areas, an overall decline in wages, poverty and crime increased, and social disintegration set in.<sup>632</sup> For his part, Roger Starr published his own book on the topic, *The Rise and Fall of New York City*, in which he defends his record and lays blame for New York's problems entirely on an influx of poor and minority residents and a liberal political regime that bankrupted the city in an attempt to offer them dignity. Regardless of where the fault lay, it is safe to say that New York City was becoming unlivable for many, while Chicago remained functional, reasonably safe and relatively affordable for a major city. And it is in this era – the late 1960s and early 1970s, that the Off-Loop theatre scene took shape.

The mere fact that Chicago functioned at all in the 1970s was a source of local pride. Milton Rakove's 1975 book, *Don't Make No Waves, Don't Back No Losers: An Insider's Analysis of the Daley Machine* describes life in Chicago at the end of the Daley era:

The mass of the citizenry, whose aspirations and expectations are limited and personal, are pacified by the maintenance of good city services, often at a higher cost than seems necessary but of a fairly good quality. Chicago has a first-class police department, one of the best fire departments in the country, excellent public transportation facilities, a network of high-speed expressways for motorists, good street lighting, adequate sewers, good curb repairs, satisfactory tree trimming and removal, a fairly effective rodent control program, and some urban renewal. The crime rate is no worse than in most other big cities, automobile traffic is fairly well handled, and traffic fatalities have been reduced. Job opportunities are usually the best of any big city in the country, an adequate

---

<sup>632</sup> Fitch 41.

welfare program has been maintained, the tax rate is kept at a bearable level, and the financial status of the city is fairly sound.”<sup>633</sup>

I contend that a significant factor in the emergence of Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre scene in the mid-1970s can be directly attributed to New York City’s decline. Viewed from the standpoint of someone beginning a theatre career at the time – such as a recent college graduate from a Midwestern university theatre program – Chicago in the mid-1970s likely seemed a practical and preferable alternative to New York. It was a big city, but a much less expensive one in which to live. The commercial and professional theatre industry was much smaller, but young actors, directors, and writers had much greater opportunity to work in non-union theatres in Chicago.<sup>634</sup> One could stage their own show relatively easily: rents were cheap for both apartments and performance space, it was not necessary to own a car, and Off-Loop theatre efforts were beginning to gain wider attention. *Saturday Night Live*, which premiered in 1975, helped make Second City a household name, and David Mamet and St. Nicholas Theatre were beginning to make waves in Chicago and beyond. The economic disposition in the habitus of Off-Loop theatre that sees Chicago as an alternative to New York City began to take root in the mid-1970s, but was based in economic and political circumstances that evolved in the 1950s and 60s.

---

<sup>633</sup> Rakove, Milton L. *Don't Make No Waves--Don't Back No Losers: An Insider's Analysis of the Daley Machine*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1975. Print. 14.

<sup>634</sup> Actor’s Equity had significantly less influence and oversight in Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s than in New York. As I show in a later section, Equity’s attempts to protect their members working in Off- and Off-Off-Broadway theatres in New York had the unintended effect of stifling the theatre’s ability to operate as sites of experimentation through excessive regulation.

## Off-Broadway, Off-Off-Broadway, and Off-Loop

The rise and fall of Off- and Off-Off-Broadway in New York as a space for artistic experimentation not only contributed to the emergence of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre scene, but is also the source for the disposition to view Chicago's theatre as an alternative to New York's. This idea seems to have emerged in the early to mid-1970s, and follows the decline of New York's Off-Off-Broadway scene as a site for low-risk experimentation in both financial and critical terms. The Off-Broadway movement began in reaction to the commercialization of Broadway. In *Playing Underground*, Stephen J. Bottoms writes:

In the years following World War II, the need for an alternative to Broadway once again became keenly felt, as the economic imperatives of commercial theatre became more cutthroat than ever. Producers and investors were caught in a two-way economic pinch: a consumer-driven inflationary boom was driving the costs of production to unprecedented heights, while theater audiences were being seduced away by the ever-more-spectacular offerings of cinema and by that newest home-comfort appliance, the television. The significant new voices of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller managed to establish themselves on Broadway in the late 1940s, and by 1950s, the incidence of unknown playwrights being launched with full-scale productions fell almost to zero. Producers simply would not risk capital on new voices or untried material, and relied instead on familiar names, formulaic entertainments, and the wholesale pilfering of successful product from London's West End.<sup>635</sup>

---

<sup>635</sup> Bottoms 19.

As production costs increased and audiences diminished, producers became more reluctant to take risks as the cost of failure was too great; additionally, the reliance on familiar names in the casts meant young actors were not getting opportunities. Off-Broadway developed as a place for new work and new talent to be tested. In *New Broadways: Theatre Across America 1950 – 1980*, Gerald M. Berkowitz breaks down Off-Broadway’s growth into three periods. In the first era, 1950 to 1958, the alternative scene develops; the repertory at this point was dominated by classics and revivals of American plays, and the early scene produced no new playwrights. New playwrights, such as Edward Albee, began to emerge in the second period between 1959 and 1966.<sup>636</sup> After 1966, commercialism took over. Berkowitz notes that Off-Broadway evolved into simply a smaller version of Broadway; staging work that just as commercial, but better suited to smaller houses and more select audiences.”<sup>637</sup> He goes on to state that although Off-Broadway’s “vital period” was brief, “Off-Broadway broke the Broadway monopoly in the public perception and created room for other possibilities.”<sup>638</sup> In other words, it helped propagate the *idea* of an alternative theatre scene, and provided a production model, contributing to the overall habitus of theatre in America.

Prior to the Off-Broadway movement, the art theatre/little theatre movement of the early twentieth century was the only model for an alternative to commercial theatre. By the 1950s, the idea of “little theatre” had largely come to mean amateur or community theatre – it was no longer a challenge or alternative to the commercial theatre. The example offered by

---

<sup>636</sup> Bottoms 21.

<sup>637</sup> Berkowitz, Gerald M. *New Broadways: Theatre Across America, 1950-1980*. Totowa, N.J: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982. Print. 25-6.

<sup>638</sup> Berkowitz 24.

Off-Broadway had an impact in Chicago that could clearly be seen by 1958, with Minnie Galatzer's American Cavalcade Theatre production of *The Crucible*. The term "Off-Loop," as a cognate of "Off-Broadway," seems to have been first used by Galatzer's group to promote their project.<sup>639</sup> The term "Off-Loop" gained currency in Chicago to describe a local, non-commercial alternative theatre. At this point in the late 1950s, it was more theoretical than literal, but coining the term "Off-Loop theatre" was a significant contribution to the habitus: the movement now had a name, even if the movement itself did not yet exist.

As the Off-Broadway scene developed in the 1950s, it soon lost relevance as a field in which to do innovative or experimental work. Actors Equity revised its rules in 1949 to create a category allowing union members to work in Off-Broadway plays at a lower pay rate; while this was done in the name of protecting performers, it opened the door to the commercialization and professionalization of the scene.<sup>640</sup> As Berkowitz notes, by the mid-1960s, Off-Broadway had become simply a smaller version of Broadway. In answer to the need for an arena in which to take creative risks and experiment, a new alternative scene - Off-Off-Broadway – developed. This scene emerged in the coffee houses and progressive churches of New York's Greenwich Village in the early 1960s. As such, Off-Off-Broadway can be viewed as the theatrical expression of the Greenwich Village arts scene that also gave rise to beat poetry, "happenings," pop art, folk music, and modern dance – it was the theatrical expression of a counterculture.

Bottoms cites a September 1960 production of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* at the Take 3 coffeehouse on Bleecker Street as the birth of the movement.<sup>641</sup> The program notes for the

---

<sup>639</sup> Sills, Kathleen. "The Inside Track to the Future: Chicago Theater, 1950–1971." Diss. Tufts U, 2001. Print. 21.

<sup>640</sup> Bottoms 19.

<sup>641</sup> Bottoms 23.

production called for “a return to the original idea of Off-Broadway theatre, in which imagination is substituted for money, and plays can be presented in ways that would be impossible in the commercial theatre.”<sup>642</sup> Bottoms characterizes the Off-Off-Broadway scene as a community, with coffeehouses such as Caffè Cino and LaMama, the Judson Church and St. Mark’s Church as its anchors:

This theatre was created largely by young, disaffected refugees from the American heartlands, who found their way to downtown Manhattan in the late 1950s and early 1960s and who – for the most part – had little or no formal education in the arts. These “new bohemians” were as likely to be inspired creatively, by B-movies and comic books as by Baudelaire or Cocteau.<sup>643</sup>

The first article about Off-Off-Broadway appeared in the *New York Times* in April 1965; more press attention quickly followed, and almost overnight Off-Off-Broadway was discovered by the mainstream.<sup>644</sup> Also in 1965, Equity rules were revised to allow union members to work in Off-Off-Broadway productions, albeit for no pay. Equity’s “Showcase Code” stated that shows could run no longer than ten performances in three weeks, admission could not be charged, audiences were limited to one hundred, no advertising or publicity could be done, and theatres were no longer allowed to “pass the hat” for donations. While intended to protect actors from exploitation, the new rules severely limited companies’ ability to operate.<sup>645</sup> As had been the case with the Off-Broadway scene in the 1950s, Equity’s acknowledgement of Off-Off-Broadway

---

<sup>642</sup> Bottoms 23.

<sup>643</sup> Bottoms 34.

<sup>644</sup> Bottoms 262.

<sup>645</sup> Bottoms 267.



served to legitimize and professionalize the scene, but inadvertently stifled its most salient qualities: risk, creativity and experimentation. Bottoms further notes:

The creative interests of writers, directors, and composers were irrelevant to the union, and with any show in which Equity members remained unpaid now designated an “actors’ showcase,” there was a sudden influx to the off-off-Broadway scene of career-oriented actors who would never previously have dreamed of working in these “illegitimate” spaces. The tiny, ad-hoc stages of the East and West Villages were now platforms on which actors could “showcase” their talents to potential agents and producers – assuming, of course, that any could be persuaded to turn up.”<sup>646</sup>

Lastly, the availability of federal arts funding beginning in 1966, further contributed to Off-Off-Broadway’s decline. Funding tended to flow to the most “professional” organizations, i.e. those that were the best organized and followed more formal organizational structures. Groups such as LaMama had to decide whether they wanted to adhere to more mainstream fiscal practices and less controversial artistic choices in order to obtain funding, or, like Judson Church, remain “amateur” and forgo funding.<sup>647</sup> The influx of mainstream attention, professional actors, and grant money into the scene served to kill off the spirit of experimentation and community that gave the movement vitality in the first place.<sup>648</sup> The Off-Off-Broadway scene, like Broadway and Off-Broadway before it, had become too expensive, regulated, and commercialized as a field in which to take risks.

---

<sup>646</sup> Bottoms 267.

<sup>647</sup> Bottoms 274-76.

<sup>648</sup> Bottoms 278.

Off-Off-Broadway's loss of relevance as a site of experimentation was also part of a larger cultural shift, away from the countercultural ethos of the 1960s and towards a more corporate approach, necessitated by the pursuit of government and corporate funding. Some could not weather the change. "Thus, by the mid-1970s, underground voices of all varieties had either found accommodations with the establishment, or fallen largely silent."<sup>649</sup> Off-Off-Broadway continued to exist, but was no longer a place in which new playwrights, beginning directors, or newly-minted actors could easily work. Berkowitz writes that "The assumption of commercial failure was virtually built into the system, and the opportunity to fail and fail again without shame meant, at least for some, the opportunity to learn their craft and develop their powers."<sup>650</sup> Off-Off-Broadway can be considered as an "art world," in Howard S. Becker's definition; "An art world is born when it brings together people who never cooperated before to produce art based on and using conventions previously unknown or not exploited in that way. Similarly, an art world dies when no one cooperates any longer in its characteristic conventions."<sup>651</sup> It is safe to say that Off-Off-Broadway "died" in the late-1960s: it was no longer supporting the kind of innovation and risk-taking that had called the scene into existence in the first place. At the same time, there is always a need for places in which to experiment; as Off-Off-Broadway faded, Off-Loop theatre emerged.

While, as Berkowitz noted, the cultural zeitgeist shifted in the 1970s, the drama departments of American colleges produced graduates in ever-greater numbers who wanted to act, design, direct, and write plays. With New York City growing increasingly unpleasant from an

---

<sup>649</sup> Bottoms 346.

<sup>650</sup> Berkowitz 97.

<sup>651</sup> Becker, Howard Saul. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: U of California Press, 2008. Print. 310.

economic standpoint, and Off-Off-Broadway no longer viable as a site for new work and new artists, the mid-1970s generation of “young, disaffected refugees from the American heartlands,” (as Bottoms characterized the founders of Off-Off-Broadway scene), began to look elsewhere.<sup>652</sup> I contend that New York’s economic and social decline coupled with the demise of Off-Off-Broadway as a site of experimentation and innovation contributed to the emergence of Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre scene in the mid-1970s. The disposition of Chicago as an alternative to New York, widely held by Off-Loop theatre community members, and of the Off-Loop theatre scene as existing in opposition to New York’s commercial theatre, dates to this time. Not coincidentally, Steppenwolf Theatre was founded by a group of Illinois State University students in 1976; the genesis of the group in this era ties their story irrevocably to this part of the habitus – Steppenwolf has become the synecdoche for Chicago theatre.<sup>653</sup>

### **The Regional Theatre Movement in Chicago**

The 1950s and 1960s also saw the rise of the regional theatre movement throughout the country. In *New Broadways: Theatre Across America 1950 – 1980*, Berkowitz cites the wave of professional, non-profit, non-commercial theatres that developed in cities outside of New York in this period: Dallas’ Theatre ’47, Houston’s Alley Theatre, the Arena Stage in Washington, DC, and the Actors Workshop of San Francisco exemplify this movement.<sup>654</sup> In *Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage*, Joseph Wesley Zeigler views the regional theatre movement as an aesthetic and conceptual rejection of the commercial theatre ethos, characterizing it as a conscious revolt against Broadway:

---

<sup>652</sup> Bottoms 34.

<sup>653</sup> Coe, Robert. "Steppenwolf Howls Again." *American Theatre*, May 1996: 12. EBSCOhost. Web. 25 May 2018.

<sup>654</sup> Berkowitz 60.

The regional theatre phenomenon has been a major and determined attempt to spread American culture throughout the country and even more to create a new basis of theatre not dependent on Broadway. The purpose of decentralization has been less to spread the wealth than to triumph in an ideological war between the institutional theatre and the commercial theatre. Those in the forefront of the regional theatre movement see it as a way to strip Broadway of its power.<sup>655</sup>

While Zeigler may be overstating the underpinnings of the movement, the insurgency he identifies became sustainable largely due to new tax laws. In 1954, the federal tax code was changed to allow for the existence of foundations “to provide grants to artistic causes, as a philanthropic tax dodge.”<sup>656</sup> In 1957, the Ford Foundation made the first grants to regional theatres by giving grants to directors from several young regional companies to be used for their own professional development, a group which included John Reich of Chicago’s Goodman Theatre.<sup>657</sup> In 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts was established and made even more funding available, further helping to establish, institutionalize, and legitimize professional regional theatre companies located beyond New York City.<sup>658</sup>

The regional theatre movement almost completely bypassed Chicago, however, and the city’s efforts to get on the “regional repertory theatre” bandwagon in the 1960s also contributed to the habitus. Berkowitz observes that there were essentially three methods for a

---

<sup>655</sup> Zeigler, Joseph Wesley. *Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1973. Print. 4.

<sup>656</sup> Bottoms 23; Arnsberger, Paul, et al. "A History of the Tax-Exempt Sector: An SOI Perspective." *Statistics of Income (SOI) Bulletin*. 27.3 (2008): 105-135. EBSCOhost. Web. 21 May 2018. .

<sup>657</sup> Zeigler 64.

<sup>658</sup> Zeigler 182.

professional regional theatre to develop: the “visionary leader” model, in which an amateur group grows into a professional company under the leadership of a strong personality, such as Margo Jones with the Theatre ’47 in Dallas; the “Guthrie model,” in which a new or existing professional ensemble sets up shop in a new city, as Tyrone Guthrie did with his theatre in Minneapolis; and “by decree,” when an educational institution or city government used grant money to establish a professional theatre company, as was the case with Seattle Rep.<sup>659</sup> All three methods were tried in Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s, without success. Minnie Galatzer and her American Cavalcade Theatre seems to have been one example of an attempt to follow the “visionary leader” route in the late 1950s. For her part, Galatzer may have been too steeped in commercial theatre aesthetics and practices to commit to an alternative approach to creating a professional theatre, and Chicago’s philanthropic community was clearly not ready to follow her or her group very far down this road in 1958. *Variety* noted that “. . . the Cavalcade has rather skimpy financing, so it probably couldn’t survive an outright flop for its initial production. Thus, the fate of the whole project appears to hang on Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*.”<sup>660</sup> Sadly, *The Crucible* was not successful, and Galatzer and her company disappeared, as was covered in the previous chapter.

In 1959, Chicago was one of seven cities under consideration by the founders of the Guthrie theatre as a potential home for the new theatre company. They wanted to start their new theatre outside of New York, but in a city “... large enough to support a theatre, and small enough to enable us to be a big frog.”<sup>661</sup> Chicago did not make the cut for two reasons: first, it

---

<sup>659</sup> Berkowitz 61.

<sup>660</sup> “Stock Review: The Crucible.” *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)* Dec. 3, 1958: 90. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

<sup>661</sup> Zeigler 67.

already had a professional theatre scene - Broadway road companies playing in the Loop and a few professional dinner theatres scattered around the suburbs. Secondly, there was a complete lack of interest on the part of the city's political and cultural leadership at the time to support such a venture. Instead, the Guthrie Theatre made Minneapolis its home, and opened in 1963.<sup>662</sup>

In 1966, Mayor Daley attempted to "decree" a professional repertory theatre into existence, with no success. The project was dependent upon Chicago's philanthropic community to raise necessary funding, and had little support from within the Mayor's office. The effort, which I will refer to by the title of the initial proposal, *A Program for the Arts in Chicago*, contributed to the habitus of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre community in that it began a debate and a conversation about theatre in Chicago, which helped create the conditions necessary to foment the Off-Loop theatre scene that followed.

### ***A Program for the Arts in Chicago, 1966***

Although not interested in a regional theatre when offered the chance in 1959, the success of the Guthrie and other regional theatres did not go unnoticed in Chicago. In the early 1960s, Mayor Daley created the Committee for Economic and Cultural Development, "a blue-ribbon Establishment group" which included a Cultural Advisory Committee chaired by business executive Daggett Harvey.<sup>663</sup> Harvey's committee spent \$60,000 to commission a study of the arts in Chicago, the results of which were titled *A Program for the Arts in Chicago*, and

---

<sup>662</sup> Ziegler 73.

<sup>663</sup> Christiansen, Richard. *A Theater of Our Own: A History and a Memoir of 1,001 Nights in Chicago*. Evanston, IL; Northwestern UP, 2004. Print. 121.

published in June 1966.<sup>664</sup> Based on questionnaires and interviews with various constituencies, the report came to the conclusion that what Chicago needed more than anything else was a resident professional theatre company, to be housed in a new arts center located in the Loop. The Guthrie in Minneapolis had demonstrated the cultural and economic impact of a professional theatre company located downtown, and Chicago's political establishment and philanthropic class suddenly saw the dire need to have one too. Furthermore, Mayor Daley never met a construction project funded with someone else's money that he did not like: as Taylor and Cohen note in *American Pharaoh*, Daley was adept at using federal funds to construct highways, housing projects, and the University of Illinois-Chicago campus to act as racial barriers around the central business district in order to keep African-Americans from "taking over" the Loop.<sup>665</sup> A new downtown arts center could well have become another such project.

The recommendations made in the report were based on interviews and surveys with the public, although upon examination it is clear that the conclusions reached were based on flawed and leading questions. For example: "How would you rate the overall cultural level of Chicago as compared with each of the four cities below?" The possible answers were Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York, San Francisco. While "overall cultural level" is subjective and undefined, the selection of cities is also suspect: New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles were the three largest cities; according to the 1960 census, San Francisco was tenth and Minneapolis came in at number 26. If the question were intended to compare large cities, the other two in

---

<sup>664</sup> Sills 136.

<sup>665</sup> Cohen and Taylor 229.

the question *should* have been Philadelphia and Detroit. One can easily surmise Minneapolis was included because of the Guthrie Theatre. Respondents felt Chicago was superior to Los Angeles and Minneapolis, inferior to New York, and about even with San Francisco. Another question asked: "How strong or how weak do you believe Chicago is in each of the six cultural activities listed below?" Chicago's theatre was considered the "weakest" after dance, while "Museums and Galleries" and "Orchestral Music" were the "strongest." However, it is unclear if "strong" and "weak" referred to quality or quantity: the general public often has much greater exposure to museums and orchestras than to professional theatre or dance, if by no other means than through field trips in the public schools. Finally, respondents were asked, "How greatly needed, in your opinion, are the following additional physical facilities for Chicago's cultural activities?" "Professional Repertory Theatre" is listed alongside such headings as "More Community Theatres," "Small Halls for Choral Groups, Poetry" and "New Opera House." Just over fifty-three percent of respondents stated that a professional repertory theatre was "much needed." This is problematic because the question is phrased in terms of the need for a facility – a professional repertory theatre appearing to be equivalent to a new opera house - rather than of need for a company or institution. In short, the survey was designed to arrive at a foregone conclusion - the need for a new arts center to be constructed.

The report estimated that building a 1,200 - 1,700-seat performing arts center, launching a professional resident company and operating it for the first three seasons would cost between \$5 and \$10 million.<sup>666</sup> The report also advocated other projects - some of which

---

<sup>666</sup> "Plans Announced for Chicago Repertory Theater Company." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* July 14, 1966: 22. ProQuest. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.



were already underway at the time - such as the creation of an arts council, the establishment of the Museum of Contemporary Arts, the renovation of the Auditorium Theatre, and a mobile theatre to bring plays to the neighborhoods. It is most noteworthy, however, for its relentless advocacy for a new theatre, at times resorting to playing on Chicago's "Second City Syndrome":

Now we find ourselves trying to catch up. Suddenly – or so it may seem – we have thriving new arts centers springing up all over the country, new arts councils in scores of communities, new orchestras being started – new theatres and museums, substantial support opening up from heretofore reluctant foundations and individuals, and a great new federal arts program being launched.<sup>667</sup>

*A Program for the Arts in Chicago* was unveiled by the Mayor during a press conference held in his office in July 1966, which perhaps created the impression of the Mayor having greater support for the idea than actually existed.<sup>668</sup>

While Daley had a longstanding interest in preserving the economic vitality of the downtown area, the arts were barely on his radar.<sup>669</sup> Kathleen Sills interviewed *Tribune* critic Richard Christiansen regarding Daley's support for the arts: "Well, he (Daley) was when he thought it was good for the city. He was certainly not a cultural person. . ."<sup>670</sup> Daley's interest in the project likely centered on the ability of a new downtown performing arts center and its potential to keep jobs and money flowing into the Loop, as well as the availability of federal

---

<sup>667</sup> *A Program for the Arts in Chicago*. Chicago: Mayor's Committee for Economic and Cultural Development, 1966. Print. 10.

<sup>668</sup> "Plans Announced for Chicago Repertory Theater Company;" Leonard, William. "After ACT, it's Back to Theater Drawing Board." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* June 25, 1967: 2. ProQuest. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.

<sup>669</sup> Cohen and Taylor 10.

<sup>670</sup> Sills 107-8.

money to build it. *A Program for the Arts in Chicago* alludes several times to *potential* federal funding, but promises nothing. The report was announced before any external funding had been secured, and no city funds were committed to the project at any point. If this was to happen, it was up to private citizens: the report goes so far to suggest that if the citizens of Chicago want the kind of theatre that the study says they do, they must raise the money for it themselves. “. . . Chicago must demonstrate its sincerity in this endeavor by raising a major portion of the total amount. Raising the Chicago portion of the funds will require the participation of all segments of the Chicago community under the leadership of a committee of the most prestigious persons in the community.<sup>671</sup> Unfortunately, “prestigious persons in the community” did not take the bait.

Critic William Leonard of the *Tribune* followed the never-to-be “Chicago Repertory Theater” story over the ensuing years. Leonard was initially an enthusiastic supporter of the idea, although he made note that most of the arguments presented by the city in favor of a repertory theatre were economic, rather than artistic.<sup>672</sup> As time went on and the plan went nowhere, Leonard grew frustrated and caustic. In June 1967, he noted that “The 13-man steering committee, appointed on that afternoon nearly a year ago, still are out, steering somewhere. No one has brought in a suggestion for a site, much less a blueprint.”<sup>673</sup> In 1968, he insinuated that apathy on the part of the city hall was stalling the theatre.<sup>674</sup> In 1969, on the

---

<sup>671</sup> Leonard, William. "Theater for Chicago? If We Don't Stumble Taking the 1st Step." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* July 24, 1966: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.

<sup>672</sup> Leonard, William. "Good Theater Aids Culture (and Business)." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Aug. 28, 1966: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec. 2017

<sup>673</sup> Leonard, "After ACT, it's Back to Theater Drawing Board."

<sup>674</sup> Leonard, William. "City's Repertory Dream Still that After 2 Years." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* July 7, 1968: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.

three-year anniversary of the Mayor's initial announcement and projected opening day of the theatre, Leonard wrote bitterly:

No one ever put a foot-pound of effort into trying to raise a dollar or into doing anything else. Not a wheel was turned. Nothing – not a thing – ever was done toward building and staffing a repertory company after that “launching day.” It should rate as a black eye for Chicago's cultural image. Instead, everybody has forgotten it.<sup>675</sup>

Although unsuccessful, *A Program for the Arts in Chicago* was significant in that it helped articulate and create a desire for a local professional theatre where none had previously existed. The project ignited a public discussion about the arts and culture in the city, which helped to coalesce and engage an audience for professional theatre in Chicago. *Chicago Magazine*, a publication of the Mayor's Committee for Economic and Cultural Development intended to promote the city's business and tourism, furthered the idea of a professional repertory theatre for Chicago from its premiere issue in 1964. A prominent article asked “What will the next quarter-century bring? Here is a portrait of Chicago in 1990, based on interviews with 18 leading citizens.” Daggett Harvey, chairman of the Cultural Advisory Committee, reassured readers that “In Chicago, we will have a resident or repertory theatre much earlier than 1990.” Earle Ludgin, chairman of the Ravinia Festival Board, noted that “My feeling is that the theater is starved in Chicago. There is great pentup interest – plenty of wood but somebody's got to start the fire.” The article goes on to note that “Ludgin doubts that Chicago

---

<sup>675</sup> Leonard, William. "Today's Day to Unveil City's New Repertory Theater--Where is it?" *Chicago Tribune* (1963-Current file) July 13, 1969: 1. ProQuest. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.

will have, in the next 25 years, a cultural center comparable to New York's Lincoln Center, but that a resident repertory theatre company is a possibility."<sup>676</sup> It is important to note that at this point in time – 1964 - it is unlikely that the survey which led to *A Program for the Arts in Chicago*, had been completed.<sup>677</sup> Yet, *Chicago Magazine* regularly made mention of Chicago's lack of a professional repertory theatre in its early issues. In the second issue, theatre critic Glenna Syse noted that "To beat an old drum, what Chicago needs is its own permanent professional repertory company, and nothing but the best will do. It must be housed centrally in a building equipped with the latest facilities and it must have the best talent and business heads at its disposal."<sup>678</sup> It is likely that Mayor Daley agreed wholeheartedly.

A year later, in the Winter 1965 issue, *Chicago Magazine* convened a roundtable of the city's arts leadership to discuss the future of the arts in the city. Titled somewhat ironically, "Culture – Does Anyone Really Care?" it was prefaced with "Nine who care about the state of Chicago's arts, who think about them and worry about them and act for them, gathered to discuss the state of what they care about, to ponder changes and possibilities." The panel included Alvina Krause, director of Northwestern University's theatre program, John Reich of the Goodman Theatre, Robert Sickinger of Hull-House Theatre, and Paul Zimmerer, chairman of the Mayor's Council for Economic and Cultural Development. Reich began the discussion by characterizing Chicago's artistic community as "a place in which substandard people are constantly fed in from the bottom, and the top people – financially, artistically, culturally – are

---

<sup>676</sup> Favoino, Gabriel. "Chicago Next." *Chicago Magazine* 1964; 92–94. Print. 92.

<sup>677</sup> The first issue of *Chicago Magazine* is undated, although the copyright is 1964. It appears to have been a quarterly publication: the second issue is "Winter 1965" followed by Spring, Summer, and a second "Winter 1965" issue. *A Program for the Arts in Chicago* was based on a "year-long" survey, according to most reports, and was issued in July 1966.

<sup>678</sup> Syse, Glenna. "The Theatre – Such As It Is" *Chicago Magazine* Winter 1965: 10-12. Print. 10.

constantly siphoned off the top. (...) Nobody who can afford it seems to make the city of Chicago an end in itself.”<sup>679</sup> Most agreed in principle with Reich’s assertion, which says much about the *weltanschauung* of Chicago’s arts community at the time: the city had taken the “Second City” label to heart. A great deal of the ensuing discussion focused on developing audiences, garnering financial support, and overcoming the conditions articulated by Reich in his opening statement.

Zimmerer was often put on the defensive regarding the actions and involvement of the Mayor’s Committee when it came to fostering the arts in Chicago. While some were optimistic, there appears to have been a significant level of distrust among the panelists for what the Mayor’s Office was intending to do, causing Zimmerer at one point to deflect criticism with, “Hopefully our cultural assessment will look at how do we bring the totality of the arts and arts programs in Chicago together.” The “cultural assessment” being the survey which led to *A Program for the Arts in Chicago*, in progress at the time of the discussion but apparently well-known to all participants. The article, prominently featured in *Chicago* magazine, may have been an attempt to influence the results of the survey. Not coincidentally, the article is itself referenced by name in the introduction to *A Program for the Arts in Chicago*:

Chicago has some of the finest cultural resources in the United States, as this survey report will show. It has a fine cultural background in the arts of which the city is justly proud. But has it caught the spark of cultural excitement that is noticeable in some other cities today – Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Pittsburgh, Louisville, Winston-Salem, Houston and others? Has Chicago missed

---

<sup>679</sup>Jacobi, Peter P. “Culture – Does Anyone Really Care?” *Chicago Magazine* Winter 1965: 62 – 71. Print. 63.

the boat, as some critics ask? “Does Anyone Really Care?” asks *Chicago* magazine about culture.<sup>680</sup>

Considering that the article appeared simultaneously with the Mayor’s Committee for Economic and Cultural Development’s cultural assessment, and in a publication of the Mayor’s Committee, it did not quite succeed as propaganda. However, it gave a platform to Robert Sickinger to articulate a vision of what the Off-Loop Theatre community would subsequently become. In response to a question about creating a Lincoln Center-style complex for Chicago, Sickinger stated:

I feel the leadership here should consider the arts at the neighborhood level. Just as one has a doctor on the way home or a dentist or a school, there should be a performing arts center in each neighborhood. In each neighborhood there should be art. And if we have this then we will have all we ever need. Big things will never give us anything. I can spend anybody’s money. If somebody gave me a big repertory company, I could very successfully and enjoyably work in that. That is impractical. We will find as with Lincoln Center that it doesn’t answer any of the problems of the city. Everybody should walk by a theatre on his way home from work, by an art gallery, by a symphony. Otherwise art will diminish.<sup>681</sup>

Later in the article, the theatre people on the panel were asked, “If you were in charge of a Chicago repertory theater....” Krause discussed the kinds of plays she’d like to present, Reich bemoaned the lack of well-trained actors in Chicago, while Sickinger advocates for “. . . a

---

<sup>680</sup> *A Program for the Arts in Chicago*, 14.

<sup>681</sup> Jacobi 67.

theater that has roots.” He later returns to his vision of neighborhood theatres, “I would like to see a theater for everybody on his way home from work in every neighborhood of the city. In old firehouses, old police stations, garages. They could be utilized for these purposes. They could be art centers.”<sup>682</sup> What Sickinger described – theatre at the neighborhood level, using found space, a theatre with “roots” in the life of Chicago– is what eventually came to be in the 1970s. As we shall see with Sickinger’s work with Hull-House’s theatre programs in the 1960s, he not only offered a vision of a future theatre scene, he also shaped the aesthetics and ethos of the Off-Loop theatre habitus.

*A Program for the Arts in Chicago* created a vogue for panel discussions in the mid-1960s. In September 1966, the Adult Education Council of Greater Chicago announced a public forum and panel on “Chicago’s Cultural Climate,” consisting of academics, arts administrators, civic planning experts and once again, Paul Zimmerer.<sup>683</sup> His participation in both panels suggest that the Mayor’s office was attempting to manage public reaction to the report, which was not always positive. At a meeting of the Northwestern University Club the following month, Daggett Harvey found himself having to defend the study to civic leaders: “Too much attention was paid to the report’s stylistic imperfections and not enough to its essential content.”<sup>684</sup> Sills notes that another symposium was held at Hull-House Theatre in October 1966, which focused on the proposed repertory theatre. This panel was moderated by critic Richard Christiansen, and included Sickinger, Richard Ross, a deputy director of the Mayor’s Committee on Economic

---

<sup>682</sup> Jacobi 71.

<sup>683</sup> Powers, Irene. "Critics Will Appraise Cultural Study of City." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Sept. 8, 1966: 1. ProQuest. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.

<sup>684</sup> "Arts Program Critics Lashed." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 27, 1966: 1. ProQuest. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.

and Cultural Development, as well as professional actors, stage managers, playwrights and producers based in Chicago.<sup>685</sup>

In Sills' account of the proceedings, based on a transcript printed in Hull-House's *Intermission* magazine, the theatre people on the panel express concern "...that the project would not grow out of the Chicago theater community and utilize Chicago talent and resources but would instead import the entire institution and plop it down in the Loop somewhere."<sup>686</sup> There was a consensus among the panelists that Chicago lacked the professional talent to staff such a theatre locally, questions about the artistic direction and repertoire of such a theatre, and concerns that such a large institution would impinge on fundraising efforts of other groups, although there was little concern that a large new theatre would cut into audiences for the smaller theatres.<sup>687</sup> When asked if theatre people had been consulted about establishing a repertory theatre, deputy director Ross replied that no, they had not. He added "... but then the question is, quite bluntly, have THEY created a resident, professional theater? (. . . ) They simply haven't done it and, therefore, don't know. I'm not sure whether theater people are the best people to ask about the need for a theatre."<sup>688</sup> Taken alongside William Leonard's reporting on the "Chicago Repertory Theatre," it becomes clear that the Mayor's Committee had little real interest in creating a theatre, had mishandled the project from the start and began to retreat in the face of criticism.

---

<sup>685</sup> Sills 139.

<sup>686</sup> Sills 140.

<sup>687</sup> Sills 145.

<sup>688</sup> Sills 142.



However flawed, *A Program for the Arts in Chicago* seemed to articulate a desire that clearly *did* exist in the city, and the report gave people a reason to discuss it. Leonard noted “The unsatisfied demand by Chicagoans for an intellectually and emotionally stimulating theater is of itself a good and sufficient reason for creating a resident professional theater company.”<sup>689</sup> Ultimately, the proposed theatre never materialized due to funding. Leonard’s reporting on the matter demonstrated that Mayor Daley’s administration had no intention of committing money or city resources towards the project. As part of the study, respondents were asked how they felt about funding a professional theatre, and most felt that someone else should pay for it: “Large private gifts from individuals, foundations, and corporations” came in first, while any option that spent tax dollars: “City Government Support” and “Federal Government Support” rated much lower. Although a lack of political will and funding doomed the project, it was also complicated by a competing and almost simultaneous effort to bring William Ball’s American Conservatory Theatre (A.C.T.) to Chicago that began in 1966.

In August and September 1966, Ball’s company played at Ravinia. The group had formed a year earlier as a joint venture between the Pittsburgh Playhouse and Carnegie Mellon University, funded by a Rockefeller Foundation grant. A.C.T. had played long engagements at the Westport Playhouse, the Goodspeed Opera House and Stanford University, but did not have a permanent home. The company was already in negotiations with backers and city officials to make San Francisco their home when they played the engagement at Ravinia. A.C.T.’s Ravinia residency received rave reviews, enthusiastic audiences, and led to an extended engagement. Hope Abelson, a Broadway producer based in Chicago, led the effort to offer the

---

<sup>689</sup> Leonard, “Theatre for Chicago?”

company a home in downtown Chicago. "The ongoing drama of offers and negotiations ran in the local press like a serial."<sup>690</sup> In September 1966, it was announced the Mayor's Committee for Economic and Cultural Development acknowledged that an agreement had been reached with A.C.T. to spend part of the year in Chicago, and part of the year in San Francisco during the course of 1967 and 1968.<sup>691</sup> As ideal as this sounded, the plan unraveled less than a year later. Leonard reported that A.C.T. required two downtown theatres reasonably close together and available on the same dates, and this could not be arranged. Additionally, the company received an unfavorable ruling from Actors Equity, which said that their time in Chicago would be considered a "tour," and required that union members be paid at a higher rate, substantially adding to the payroll costs.<sup>692</sup> The fundraising efforts to bring A.C.T. to Chicago only served to confuse the issue in the public mind with regard to the "Chicago Repertory Theatre" plan outlined in *A Program for the Arts in Chicago*.<sup>693</sup> The false start with A.C.T. put the city-backed project a year behind schedule, and the resulting sense of defeat may have added to the inertia of the philanthropic community. By the time A.C.T. begged off in 1967, the attention of Mayor Daley's office was firmly focused on staging the 1968 Democratic National Convention. There was no further discussion of regional theatre from Mayor Daley's office.

Running through the archival materials relating to the "Chicago Repertory Theatre" efforts in the mid-1960s, one finds a sense of the city of Chicago having missed out - something

---

<sup>690</sup> Sweet, Jeffrey. "American Conservatory Theater Looks Back on Its Time in Chicago." *American Theatre* Oct. 2014. [www.americantheatre.org](http://www.americantheatre.org). Web. 20 Dec. 2017.

<sup>691</sup> "A. C. T. Plan Pleases Committee." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Sept. 13, 1966: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec 2017.

<sup>692</sup> Leonard, "After ACT, it's Back to Theater Drawing Board."

<sup>693</sup> Leonard, William. "Mayor's Culture Committee Still Marking Time." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* July 9, 1967: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.

exciting was happening in American theatre, and it was *not* happening in Chicago. The city's theatre artists and audiences had had their hopes raised by the Mayor's Office and A.C.T., only to be disappointed twice. However, the discussions and debates surrounding these efforts consciously created the habitus for civic and audience engagement with the Off-Loop theatre scene. The sentiments voiced by Bob Sickinger in 1966 – of “a theatre that has roots” were already beginning to come true with Hull-House theatre, as well as the Chicago City Players and Paul Sills efforts with improvisation. Sickinger's vision would come to fruition a decade later, when small theatres began to appear in neighborhoods. The unsuccessful efforts to establish a professional repertory theatre in Chicago in the 1960s contributed to the dispositions of Off-Loop theatre by creating discussion among artists, audiences, philanthropists, and civic officials as to what Chicago's theatre should be: namely that it should be local, indigenous, and rooted in the fabric of the city itself. Furthermore, the years of disappointment seemed to make the city accept and embrace the Off-Loop theatre scene quickly, as a theatre unique to Chicago because it was organic to it.

### **John Reich and the Goodman Theatre**

The Goodman Theatre received a new lease on life in the mid-1950s. Following the departure of visionary leader Thomas Wood Stevens in 1930, the repertory theatre ensemble was discontinued.<sup>694</sup> The Goodman Theatre school was put under the leadership of Maurice Gnesin and David Itkin, and through the 1940s and 1950s, it maintained a decent reputation as an actor training program. The Goodman's popular children's theatre program continued, and a

---

<sup>694</sup> White, Melvin R. “Thomas Wood Stevens: Creative Pioneer.” *Educational Theatre Journal* 3.4 (Dec. 1951): 280-293. JSTOR. Web. 21 May 2018. 285.

mainstage season was still presented - albeit with student actors and reflecting play choices suited to their training needs. Gray notes that "...the student productions of both classics and new plays made little impact on the Chicago audience. There was no professional company and, due to their training nature, no critics were allowed to review any of the student productions."<sup>695</sup> The public rightly came to see the Goodman as a theatre school rather than a theatre company, and it consequently faded from public perception. Additionally, the Goodman became increasingly insular and isolated from the rest of the Chicago theatre community under Gnesin and Itkin.

The Goodman continued to operate as a training center under Gnesin from 1931 until his death in 1957. At that time, the board of the Art Institute attempted to close the Goodman – it had long been seen by the parent organization as an unnecessary liability. However, as Newell notes, this plan was abandoned because "there would be considerable legal difficulty in implementing that decision since the wording of the initial gift and subsequent endowment fund from the Goodman family stipulated the maintenance of a theatrical production center for all the people of Chicago."<sup>696</sup> Unable to close it easily, and perhaps influenced by *A Program for the Arts in Chicago*, the board decided instead to look for a new director to revitalize it. John Reich was selected, and the dominant narrative of Reich's tenure was that of reestablishing a fully professional company at the Goodman, which he eventually did in 1969.<sup>697</sup> For Reich, this was something of a pyrrhic victory: the first years of a fully-professional Goodman Theatre were

---

<sup>695</sup> Gray, Stephen C. *A History of the Chicago Off-Loop Theatre Explosion: 1969 – 1989*. Diss. Ohio State U: 1997. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1999. Print. 211.

<sup>696</sup> Newell, James S. "A Critical Analysis of the Development and Growth of the Kenneth Sawyer Goodman Memorial Theatre and School of Drama, Chicago, Illinois, 1925 – 1971." Diss. Wayne State, 1973. Print. 155.

<sup>697</sup> Leonard, William. "Goodman Theater to Go Professional in October." *Chicago Tribune* (1963 – Current File) Apr. 20, 1969: 9. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

uneven, and he was eventually pushed out by a hostile Art Institute board in 1972.<sup>698</sup> However, Reich's drive to create a professional theatre company in Chicago, combined with his high-profile position, helped build support for and awareness of the need for professional theatre in Chicago, at a time when the idea was much debated and discussed in the press and among the city's philanthropic class as a result of the regional theatre movement and the Mayor's office report.

Reich came to Chicago after spending two years as an assistant professor at Columbia University.<sup>699</sup> He was originally from Vienna, and had worked and studied with Max Reinhardt's Josefstadt Theatre, a fact frequently alluded to in the press. He came to the U.S. in 1938 to teach at Ithaca College, received his Ph.D. from Cornell and then worked in New York directing opera, theatre, and television.<sup>700</sup> As a condition of his employment at the Goodman, his contract stipulated that he was allowed to hire professional actors to appear in student productions at the Goodman.<sup>701</sup> One of Reich's first actions was to "retire" longtime instructor David Itkin, as well as many other staff and faculty loyal to Gnesin and Itkin.<sup>702</sup> Reich's plan was to rebuild the professional theatre program slowly, by introducing guest artists into the casts of student shows in an effort to build subscription sales. The guest artist policy at the Goodman engaged professional actors for a single show, working with an all-student company. Due to limited budgets, Reich relied on guest artists drawn from the ranks of Off-Broadway, the

---

<sup>698</sup> Leonard, William. "A Shakeup at the Goodman." *Chicago Tribune (1963 – Current file)* Jan. 19, 1972: 3. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

<sup>699</sup> Cassidy, Claudia. "On the Aisle: Burgess Meredith to Reopen Edgewater Playhouse July 8 in 'The Circus of Dr. Lao.'" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923 – 1963)* June 3, 1957: 11. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

<sup>700</sup> "Notes on the Stage" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923 – 1963)* June 5, 1957: 8. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

<sup>701</sup> Newell 159.

<sup>702</sup> Cassidy, "On the Aisle: Burgess Meredith to Reopen . . . "

Stratford Festival, and professional actors with Chicago connections.<sup>703</sup> His emphasis on professional “name” actors helped generate press attention, which in turn boosted his subscription ticket sales campaign.

Reich’s first season set the tone for his tenure. The season was at an apex in December 1957 with the medieval morality play *Everyman*, in a version Reich both translated and directed, and featuring guest artists Ilka Diehl and Donald Buka.<sup>704</sup> Claudia Cassidy, the *Tribune*’s notoriously exacting critic, fairly gushed over it:

Welcome the Goodman back to the fold. In the days of its repertory company 20 odd years ago the beautiful theater back of the Art institute brought us many interesting and unusual plays. Now, newly under the direction of John Reich, it has reopened its doors to the public and its sight to a wider vista. Taking Mr. Reich’s production of the Salzburg ‘Everyman’ as evidence of intention, it may be that the town is in luck.<sup>705</sup>

The final event of Reich’s first season, a production titled *The Dream*, represented the nadir. It was a blend of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and Purcell’s opera *The Fairy Queen*, interspersed with original choreography by modern dance pioneer Ruth Page. This time, Cassidy was not impressed, remarking that: “The Dream, which took \$10 a ticket from a benefit audience in the Goodman theater last night, turned out to be a nightmare even by

---

<sup>703</sup> Newell 164.

<sup>704</sup> Diehl was a Chicago-based stage actor who also worked in radio and early Chicago television. Buka had done Broadway, supporting film roles in the 1940s, and was working frequently on television in the 1950s.

<sup>705</sup> Cassidy, Claudia. “On the Aisle: Interesting ‘Everyman’ in a Glow of Medieval Pageantry.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923 – 1963) Dec. 11, 1957: 13. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

amateur standards of theatrical endeavor.”<sup>706</sup> This first season is representative of Reich’s leadership at the Goodman; visionary in terms of administration, fundraising, and advocacy, but frequently uneven in terms of artistic output.

The guest artist policy was the first step in Reich’s plan to rebuild a professional company at the Goodman. The presence of guest artists drove single-ticket and subscription sales, which would help build a financial base to eventually institute a fully professional ensemble. However, Reich could not afford to have guest artists for every show in his season, in which case the newspaper critics would not review it, which in turn hurt ticket sales. Prior to Reich’s tenure, the Goodman had a small subscription base of 1,900.<sup>707</sup> Their shows had always been open to the public, but received little press or public attention because they were student productions. The guest artist program paid off at the box office: in Reich’s first season, the Goodman played to a seventy-seven percent capacity. The following season, they played to ninety-four percent capacity. Ticket sales and subscriptions continued to grow and by 1967, the Goodman had over 15,000 subscribers.<sup>708</sup> The guest artists were a double-edged sword, however: their presence improved the perceived quality of Goodman shows and raised the theatre’s public profile, but at times the juxtaposition of one or two professional actors among an all-student cast simply highlighted the disparity in talent and training.<sup>709</sup> Reviews, when they occurred, were often mixed.

---

<sup>706</sup> Cassidy, Claudia. “Goodman Theater Spring Nightmare Instead of ‘Dream.’” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923 – 1963) May 9, 1958: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

<sup>707</sup> Gray 212.

<sup>708</sup> Ross, Norman. “Summing Up the Scene.” *Chicago Magazine*, Winter 1967: 20-23. Print. 21.

<sup>709</sup> Newell 160, 175.

Reich received a significant endorsement of his efforts to rebuild the Goodman in 1959, when he was among the first ten recipients of a Ford Foundation grant given to stage directors working in regional theatres. The \$10,000 grant was intended to be used to further professional development, and recipients such as William Ball, Herbert Blau, Zelda Fichandler, and Nina Vance used the grant for travel and training.<sup>710</sup> Reich, instead asked for and received permission from the Ford Foundation to put the grant money towards paying guest artist salaries.<sup>711</sup> With it, he hired stage and television actor Murray Matheson to play the title role in Moliere's *The Imaginary Invalid*, Group Theatre founder and Broadway actor Morris Carnovsky to play Shylock in *Merchant of Venice* and Russian-born stage actress Eugenie Leontovich to direct and appear in William Saroyan's *The Cave Dwellers*.<sup>712</sup> The fact that Reich used money awarded to him by the Ford Foundation to benefit the theatre was duly noted in the local press: "Mr. Carnovsky is the first stellar dividend from the \$10,000 Ford Foundation grant awarded to John Reich, the theater's head, who elected to spend it on distinguished guests;" and "Mr. Reich has elected to apply his grant to the engagement of more personalities from professional ranks to appear at the head of Goodman student casts."<sup>713</sup> Locally, Reich's act was interpreted as one of generosity and selflessness and this relates to one of the dispositions of Off-Loop theatre: that of putting the ensemble ahead of personal ambitions.

Reich's early tenure at the Goodman can be viewed as largely successful, due to the novelty of the guest artists and the legitimating attention that the Ford Foundation grant

---

<sup>710</sup> Zeigler 64.

<sup>711</sup> Newell 167.

<sup>712</sup> Newell 170 – 174.

<sup>713</sup> "Notes of the Theatre." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923 – 1963)* Oct. 25, 1959: 12. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec. 2017; Raven, Seymour. "Goodman Season to Open on Oct. 31." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 31, 1959: 7. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.



provided. The drumbeat to establish a resident professional theatre in Chicago was underway at this time as well, and the Goodman's ambitions under Reich's leadership helped to raise local expectations. In his review of Pirandello's *Enrico IV*, William Leonard noted:

This is the third season in which the Goodman, with the aid of a grant from the Ford Foundation, has brought to town plays we otherwise wouldn't see, and brought them with good, sound, highly professional players in the key roles. (...) When you've seen that cast you've seen an acceptable, non-amateur version of a drama that never would reach a downtown stage if it were to depend on Broadway sending a production on tour. And all this talk about Chicago developing a permanent, resident, theatrical producing company of its own seems to be getting nowhere. So. . .

Perhaps John Reich, with his amateur supporting casts and professional stars, is headed in the direction of an answer to our ancient theatrical woe.<sup>714</sup>

While Leonard saw the Goodman as taking steps in the right direction, Cassidy thought Reich's gradual approach to creating a professional company was too cautious, and his standards not high enough; "If we want a residential theater, and some of us do, the only way out is the professional way, which demands talent, imagination, hard work, and the highest standards of taste and skill."<sup>715</sup> By the 1961-62 season, Reich was no longer able to afford guest artists for all shows; as a result, some season productions again featured all-student casts and were not

---

<sup>714</sup> Leonard, William. "Reich Lauded for Goodman Staging of Classic Plays." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Feb/ 21, 1960: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

<sup>715</sup> Cassidy, Claudia. "On the Aisle: Slapstick Shakespeare, Potboiler Musical, Cynical...." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Nov. 27, 1960: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

reviewed. At the same time, as if encouraged by the Goodman's continued existence, local critics became more demanding of the work presented, and reviews seemed – to Reich as least – to become more critical.<sup>716</sup>

In the mid-1960s, following the demonstrated success of the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, the push to create a resident professional theatre in Chicago was underway, as evidenced by the efforts of the Mayor's Committee for Economic and Cultural Development report *A Program for the Arts in Chicago*. As noted earlier, the effort was concurrent with a separate campaign to bring William Ball's American Conservatory Theatre to town. The Goodman Theatre seems to have been largely overlooked in these discussions, yet Reich seemed to be aiming to remake the Goodman in the image of the Guthrie; as Chicago's professional, non-profit, regional theatre ensemble.

Reich participated in the 1965 *Chicago Magazine* article titled "Culture – Does Anyone Really Care?" It was a dialogue among Chicago's arts leaders at the time, including Hull-House Theatre's Robert Sickinger, publicity agent Danny Newman, Alvina Krause of Northwestern University, choreographer Ruth Page, and Paul Zimmerer of the Mayor's Committee for Economic and Cultural Development. In it, Reich comes across as bitter:

There is a terrible inferiority complex here. One good example, when I first came here eight years ago I was highly touted by certain cultural people who knew something about the theater. After I had been here three years, one well known

---

<sup>716</sup> Newell 177.

public personality in the arts and in society said to me: “John, how come you are still in Chicago? I thought you were talented?” I think that sums it up.<sup>717</sup>

Robert Sickinger adds that he had the same experience. This is symptomatic of the arts community in Chicago at the time; i.e., the idea that in order to be successful, one must leave Chicago. This perception would remain part of the Off-Loop theatre habitus until 1984, when Steppenwolf announced that despite their recent success in New York, the company would remain active in Chicago.<sup>718</sup> At that point, the Steppenwolf Scenario became complete. To return to the *Chicago Magazine* article: Sickinger comes across as optimistic and visionary, Reich seems pessimistic and dour. He had been trying to make the Goodman into a professional theatre company for eight years at this point, and seems to have been left out of subsequent conversations and panels on the topic of establishing a professional theatre in Chicago. The Goodman – despite Reich’s efforts – seems to have not figured significantly into the popular imagination at the time. Reich is quoted in *A Program for the Arts in Chicago*, offering a definition of “repertory theatre,” but the Goodman and Reich’s attempts to make it into the kind of professional ensemble being proposed are ignored in the report.<sup>719</sup> Granted, *A Program for the Arts* was a misguided effort, but Reich was perhaps understandably feeling neglected by the city’s arts leaders, and somewhat hostile towards his critics.<sup>720</sup>

In 1966, Reich attempted to raise the stakes within the Art Institute, which he felt was holding back the Goodman’s move towards professionalization. In January, it was announced

---

<sup>717</sup> Jacobi, “Culture – Does Anyone Really Care?” 65.

<sup>718</sup> Christiansen, Richard. “Success Won’t Break Up the Gang, Steppenwolf Says.” *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* July 3, 1984: 1. ProQuest. Web. 27 May 2018.

<sup>719</sup> *A Program for the Arts in Chicago* 17.

<sup>720</sup> Jacobi, “Culture – Does Anyone Really Care?” 65.

that the Goodman would produce Moliere's *The Misanthrope* on the University of Chicago campus. Funded by a \$15,000 Rockefeller Foundation grant, twenty-nine performances were scheduled in January and February of 1966, with "name" actors George Grizzard, Barbara Baxley, Brenda Forbes, and Lee Richardson.<sup>721</sup> The show was billed as an experiment; university provost Edward H. Levi went on record as saying that the college hoped it would lead to the development of a permanent theatre based at U. of C.<sup>722</sup> It was an unqualified success: the show received positive reviews, and performances quickly sold out. Yet despite the success and interest from the university, nothing permanent materialized. Reich may have gone into the production hoping to make the point to the Art Institute board that there were other organizations in town that would be more supportive of a professional theatre; and from this perspective, it may have worked.

The production at the University of Chicago precipitated a crisis with Actors Equity, which forced the board of the Art Institute to act. Reich both directed and produced the show, in the midst of the Goodman's "regular" season. While it was produced under the aegis of the Goodman, it was not part of the regular season. Equity had agreed to a special concession to allow professional actors to appear in student productions at the Goodman, and established a special pay rate. Reich evidently paid his actors at University of Chicago at this rate. The union raised issues during the 1966-67 season; they did not want to see the practice of paying their members at what amounted to a reduced rate become more widespread in Chicago. The

---

<sup>721</sup> Leonard, William. "Second New Professional Theater in Hyde Park Launches Career Saturday." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Jan. 30, 1966: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

<sup>722</sup> Leonard, William. "U of C., Goodman Join in Theater Experiment." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Jan. 4, 1966: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

Goodman was given a two-year grace period in which to either become a fully-professional company, or stop using Equity members.<sup>723</sup> Reich got the board of the Art Institute to back the effort, and it was determined that the Goodman would “go Equity” in the 1968-69 season.

However, at the end of the 1968 season, the Art Institute board had not yet raised sufficient funding, and the union gave the Goodman a one-year extension on the agreement.<sup>724</sup> Given the fraught relationship between the Goodman and the board of the Art Institute, Reich no doubt feared that any wavering in interest or initiative on their part could spell the end of his chances at establishing a fully professional company. To “remind” the board of what they had agreed to do, he decided to restage the popular production of *The Misanthrope* at Ravinia during the summer of 1968, “It was an attempt to stimulate interest in a native Chicago professional theatre by showcasing local professional talent in an elegant production.”<sup>725</sup> The production again included Barbara Baxley, but other roles were recast, and William Leonard described it as having “less verve” than the 1966 original.<sup>726</sup> Reich may have been hoping that an enthusiastic reception from the Ravinia audience would give him more leverage with the Art Institute board.<sup>727</sup>

Ultimately, the Art Institute board came through, and it was announced on April 15, 1969 that the Goodman would have a fully professional company for the 1969-1970 season. Douglas Seale, who had previously worked at “all three Stratfords (England, Ontario, and

---

<sup>723</sup> Newell 190.

<sup>724</sup> Newell 192.

<sup>725</sup> Newell 195.

<sup>726</sup> Leonard, William. “Misanthrope Revival is Strained.” *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Aug. 22, 1968: 9. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

<sup>727</sup> Newell 196.

Connecticut)" was hired as the Artistic Director.<sup>728</sup> A company of thirteen Equity actors, along with guest artists, and six graduates of the Goodman school would present a six-play season. They would be offered a thirty-nine-week contract, and were required to reside in Chicago for the season. The first shows announced included Rolf Hochhuth's *The Soldiers*, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and Shaw's *Heartbreak House*.<sup>729</sup> Douglas Campbell, known for his work at the Stratford Festival in Ontario, and his wife Ann Casson were the first hired for the ensemble, the rest of which consisted of actors with solid regional theatre credentials.<sup>730</sup> The annual budget went from \$750,000 to \$1,000,000, and an ambitious subscription drive to reach twenty thousand subscribers, got underway.<sup>731</sup>

Hochhuth's *Soldiers*, with Campbell in the lead role, was the premiere of the Goodman's professional company in October 1969.<sup>732</sup> It was followed by Kaufman and Hart's 1936 comedy *You Can't Take It with You*, and then *The Tempest*, again with Campbell in the lead. All three productions received mixed reviews, at best.<sup>733</sup> An evening of Pinter one-acts, and Shaw's *Heartbreak House* received positive reviews, but in general, the first season seems to have been underwhelming. It is important to consider how much the tenor of the times had changed since Reich first began his campaign for a professional company in 1957: *Soldiers*, a drama about World War II, opened in Chicago two days after the local production of *Hair*. The Goodman's season, and the company itself - in particular regional theatre pioneers Douglas

---

<sup>728</sup> Leonard, "Goodman Theater to Go Professional in October."

<sup>729</sup> Newell 198.

<sup>730</sup> Leonard, William. "Goodman Lists Six Plays for its First Resident Season." *Chicago Tribune* (1963 – Current file) Aug. 24, 1969: 3. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

<sup>731</sup> Newell 199.

<sup>732</sup> Leonard, William. "'Hair' and 'Soldiers': Week's 2 New Plays Hit at Establishment." *Chicago Tribune* (1963-Current file) Oct. 19, 1969: 1. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

<sup>733</sup> Newell 201.

Seale and Douglas Campbell - would have been cutting edge a decade earlier. By 1969, the cutting edge lay elsewhere.

The next season was again dominated by mixed reviews, “It is with some trepidation that we watch the Goodman Theater start the second half, this week, of its second season as a fully professional company. The three productions that comprised the first half of the season did not offer anything overwhelming, and the fourth, which opens Thursday evening, is an unknown factor.”<sup>734</sup> For the record, it was *Marching Song*, by John Whiting, and it also left the critics underwhelmed. Newell notes that the professional company was a financial and artistic failure. “Artistic standards declined precipitously in 1970-71 from those of the maiden season.” Gray characterizes the Goodman at this time as being disconnected from the audience it was attempting to reach. He terms the 70-71 season a “disaster” with critics finding productions of Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera* and Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* “boring, overlong, and peppered with bad acting” and characterizes the aesthetic issue as “The classical directors, Reich, Seale, and Campbell, were trying to force play choices on a Chicago audience that didn’t seem to care.”<sup>735</sup> The debt reached \$200,000 at the end of the season, and the decision was made to end the resident company for the 1972-73 season. The number of productions was reduced to five, and each show was cast individually. Newell states that Reich’s final season “gasped and wheezed.”<sup>736</sup>

---

<sup>734</sup> Leonard, William. “‘Marching Song’ Opens Thursday at Goodman with a Look at Honor.” *Chicago Tribune* (1963-Current file) Feb. 28, 1971: 3. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

<sup>735</sup> Gray 214-15.

<sup>736</sup> Newell 217.

In January 1972, it was announced that Reich would be “retired” and replaced with Kenneth M. Meyers as Executive Director.<sup>737</sup> Meyers’ background was primarily in commercial theatre, and his tenure was only remarkable for some of his decisions that further alienated the public, such as cutting the popular Children’s Touring Theatre to save money, and eliminating all unpaid tickets, including house seats.<sup>738</sup> The Goodman had no artistic director at this time. Instead, Meyers billed it as a “Director’s Season,” and invited prominent regional theatre directors in to direct single shows: they were essentially auditioning to be the Goodman’s next artistic director.<sup>739</sup> William Woodman, from Julliard, was offered the job, and Meyers left after the 1972-73 season. Woodman’s tenure was noteworthy for his hiring of Gregory Mosher, one of his former students from Julliard, as an assistant. Mosher would institute the dynamic Stage 2 program, which brought Off-Loop theatre artists into the Goodman fold:

Mosher began to co-opt some of the energy and talent from the exploding Off-Loop movement. One of his first successes was to lure David Mamet away from his own Off-Loop company, St. Nicholas, to the Goodman Stage 2 which began producing the premieres of his new plays. This fruitful relationship between Mosher and Mamet brought in new ideas and new audiences and helped transform the Goodman as an institution.<sup>740</sup>

---

<sup>737</sup> Newell 216.

<sup>738</sup> Newell 219.

<sup>739</sup> Gray 217.

<sup>740</sup> Gray 218.



In addition to original productions, Stage 2 became a venue for successful “transfer” productions from smaller Off-Loop theatres, creating a mutually beneficial relationship for both parties.

Notably, Mosher forged a working partnership with playwright David Mamet, which led to the Mosher-directed premiere productions of *American Buffalo* in 1975, and *A Life in the Theatre* in 1977 as part of Stage 2. When Woodman resigned as Artistic Director in 1978, Mosher was named his replacement.<sup>741</sup> Then twenty-nine years old, Mosher continued to innovate, hiring Mamet as an artistic associate, instituting the popular holiday production of Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, and focusing on new plays and playwrights in the Goodman mainstage seasons. Gray notes that in the 1979-80 season, the Goodman had over eighteen thousand subscribers and a \$1.4 million annual budget. “The Goodman’s institutional image had improved tremendously with funding from eighty-five corporations and seventeen major foundations along with a \$200,000 NEA grant.”<sup>742</sup>

Reich had been a determined leader who built (or re-built) the institutional and aesthetic structure at the Goodman, which allowed a truly visionary artistic director like Gregory Mosher to excel. However, Reich was often faulted for his elitism and reliance on European art theatre models. His long tenure at the Goodman was defined by the quest to establish a resident professional company; a venture that came to be regarded as a failure. In 1975, Roger Dettmer characterized Reich’s announcement of the repertory company inception as if he and Douglas Seale were medicine show swindlers:

---

<sup>741</sup> Gray 226.

<sup>742</sup> Gray 229.

These two self-congratulating standard-bearers – the Viennese Reich, reputedly a pre-World War II protégé of Max Reinhardt, who'd run the Goodman school and stage since 1957; and the newly joined Seale – said with veritable reverence that Douglas Campbell and his wife, Ann Casson, had consented to join their 'first-rate resident *professional* legitimate stage company.'

Campbell was an associate of Tyrone Guthrie at Stratford in Canada and later at the Minnesota Theater Co., a Scottish actor who specialized in the padded externals of Falstaff. His Mrs. was the child of Dame Sybil Thorndike, which simply proved one more time that talent is not hereditary. After three prevailingly banal seasons, not only did the Campbells depart from Goodman but also Reich and Seale.<sup>743</sup>

While Reich's results were disappointing, he created the conditions that allowed a later artistic director to take the Goodman to new heights, as Mosher did in the 1970s. In retrospect, Reich's ideas appear to have been correct – the best way to establish a professional, institutional, Guthrie-esque theatre in Chicago was to do so within an established framework, and at a time when the city's arts leaders and philanthropists were ineffective at establishing something new, the Goodman already existed and had a long history within the city. Reich's efforts were not often recognized, however. William Leonard of the *Tribune*, who had written bitterly about the Mayor's Committee's failed attempt at establishing a theatre, acknowledged this on the occasion of the Goodman's announcement that it would turn professional; "It is (...)

---

<sup>743</sup> Dettmer, Roger. "Theater: Finally, the Goodman Fulfills an 18-Year-Old Promise." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* May 18, 1975: 4. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

an established, working organization, in a theater that is comfortable and practical and efficient. Everything, including the background, is there. This is better than building a playhouse from the ground up, on an unspecified site, as they told us they were going to do, that long ago afternoon in the mayor's office."<sup>744</sup> It should be noted that Leonard was realizing that Chicago already had what it thought it wanted; it simply needed to be reactivated. This sort of blindness to its own artistic potential was also a hallmark of the city's *weltanschauung* at the time; a symptom of the Second City syndrome.

Reich and the Goodman are important to the habitus of Chicago theatre for several reasons. First, he is responsible for revitalizing an institution that was intended to be a professional theatre from its inception, and had long-neglected this aspect of its mission. Much of the blame for this situation lies with the board of the Art Institute, which often struggled to see the value of a theatre program within an institution devoted to the visual arts. In truth, Reich did not so much reinvent the Goodman, as reactivate it towards its original mission. In doing so, he reaffirmed a connection to an aspect of the Chicago theatre habitus that had developed in the Art Theatre era prior to World War I. The "new" professional productions at the Goodman brought the public back into the theatre, and began the long process of reconnecting the Goodman to a civic audience.<sup>745</sup>

Secondly, Reich evangelized the idea and necessity of a fully professional theatre for Chicago. Granted, his vision was that of the mid-century regional theatre movement, and by the time he achieved his goal in 1969, it already seemed out-of-date. Following the failures of the

---

<sup>744</sup> Leonard, "Goodman Theater to Go Professional in October."

<sup>745</sup> Although the Goodman's professional ensemble lasted only a few years, it remained an Equity theatre. The Goodman did not reestablish a permanent company, instead hiring actors by the show as it continues to do.

Mayor's Committee plans, the attempt to bring A.C.T. to the city, and other efforts to import or invent a professional theatre for Chicago, Reich's effort showed results and did so within the context of an institution that was already native to the city. This also reinforces the disposition for Chicago's civic penchant for self-regard: a preference for the local over the imported.

Finally, Reich achieved his goals within the field of the mid-century regional theatre movement. He was successful at institutionalizing his theatre, and garnering the imprimatur of foundation and government funding, which were deemed necessary and vital to theatre in the 1950s and 1960s. Chicago's drive to start a regional, professional theatre grew out of the fact that the city did not get selected to house the Guthrie: Reich and the Goodman eventually filled that void. Sadly, it was achieved a bit too late: by 1969, the paradigm of foundation-supported, institutional theatres producing classic plays in repertory was less fashionable.<sup>746</sup> However, Reich created an organizational and institutional structure strong enough to survive his departure, one that could be utilized by Woodman and notably Mosher. Under Mosher, the Goodman as an institution was able to tap into the energy of the Off-Loop movement and amplify it.<sup>747</sup>

The Goodman's success in the late 1970s was built on the synergy created when Mosher began to look to the Off-Loop theatre movement for plays, players, and playwrights.

The more established theatre was as able to get proven material while conferring an aura of success on the smaller theatre. The Goodman, St. Nicholas,

---

<sup>746</sup> The Goodman never produced in repertory, although the term was used to describe the type of theatre the Goodman wished to be at the time.

<sup>747</sup> In the late 1970s, the theatre and school became independent of the Art Institute, and later the School of Drama split from the Goodman Theatre and moved to DePaul University.

Wisdom Bridge, North Light and, eventually Steppenwolf, all used this method at some point to infuse fresh artistic energy into the institutional nature of their theatres. This is an example, depending on one's point of view, of either the cooperative relationships between theatres or of the exploitation of struggling young companies by more established groups. Both elements were probably present in such cooperative ventures, but the fact is, for whatever reason, the degree of cooperation in the Chicago theatre community was remarkable, cooperation which had tremendous benefits for everyone.<sup>748</sup>

Instead of imposing an aesthetic on Chicago, as Reich essentially did, Mosher built on what was at that point happening locally; bringing the best of what was happening in storefront theatres into the institution. In this way, the Goodman aligned itself with the burgeoning new Off-Loop theatre movement: instead of trying to be Chicago's version of the Guthrie, it became a storefront theatre on a regional theatre level.

### **Bob Siskinger and Hull-House Theatre**

More than any other single person, Bob Siskinger of Hull-House Theatre is responsible for creating the habitus of Off-Loop theatre; not just in practical and aesthetic terms, but also as far as demonstrating a work ethic which would also come to characterize the scene. The Hull-House theatre program that Siskinger ran in the 1960s provided a template for Off-Loop theatre production, as well as creating theatre spaces which would eventually come to be homes for Steppenwolf, the Organic, and many other Off-Loop companies, training actors, directors, and playwrights (most notably David Mamet), and developing an audience in the

---

<sup>748</sup> Gray 221

city's northside neighborhoods where the theatre programming was the most concentrated. Sickinger came to Chicago from Philadelphia in 1963 to head a revitalized Hull-House theatre program. In just five seasons, he created a multifaceted theatre program that completely reshaped the landscape of the theatre community in terms of both artists and audiences; yet Sickinger often faced the charge that his program did not seem to serve the social work ideals of Hull-House founder Jane Addams. Sickinger was much more interested in making theatre than doing social work, yet this was not incongruent with the Hull-House mission at the time. The Hull-House theatre of the 1960s sought to improve the quality of city life by improving its cultural and artistic activity.<sup>749</sup>

As noted earlier, theatre had a long history within Hull-House, but by the 1950s it had all but disappeared from settlement house programming. Social conditions in the late 1950s and early 1960s altered the mission and organization of Hull-House, and this led to a new focus on the arts. In 1957, the theatre building on the Hull-House campus was destroyed by fire.<sup>750</sup> Shortly afterward, the neighborhood was named as the site for the new University of Illinois Chicago campus, and the Hull-House complex was torn down to make way. In the face of this displacement, Hull-House's board of directors decided to take a new approach to their social work mission and decentralize their operations into multiple sites in neighborhoods around the city. In February 1962, Paul Jans was named the new executive director of Hull-House to lead this shift in mission. He came from the Lighthouse Settlement in Philadelphia, where he had worked with Bob Sickinger. Hecht notes that theatre activity had declined under two

---

<sup>749</sup> Hecht, Stuart Joel. *Hull-House Theatre: An Analytical and Evaluative History*. Diss. Northwestern U, 1983. ProQuest. Web. 22 Dec 2017. 209.

<sup>750</sup> Gray 95.

consecutive leaders of Hull-House, but “Unlike many professionally trained social workers, Jans recognized the intrinsic value of the arts.”<sup>751</sup>

Hull-House operations shifted to four centers: the first to open, in September 1963, was at 3212 N. Broadway, in a former American Legion post. The building was known first as Lakeview Center and later renamed the Jane Addams Center. Other neighborhood centers included the Uptown Center at 1257 W. Wilson, Parkway Center at 500 E. 67<sup>th</sup>, and the Henry Booth Center, located in the Harold L. Ickes public housing project at 3238 S. Dearborn. The Uptown and Lakeview centers served ethnically and economically diverse communities, while the Parkway and Booth Center served low-income African-American communities.<sup>752</sup> All four centers would become homes to Sickinger’s theatre program, although the Jane Addams Center was the flagship.

Sickinger and Jans became acquainted in the early 1960s, when Sickinger was running an acting studio and experimental theatre that operated out of the Lighthouse Settlement.<sup>753</sup> In an interview with Kathleen Sills, Sickinger stated that he thought Jans brought him in for his ability to raise money, “not for any artistic reasons. Therefore, Jans was surprised at the artistic heights achieved in Sickinger’s six-year tenure at Hull-House.”<sup>754</sup> Jans should not have been; in Philadelphia, Sickinger had proven to be both ambitious and tireless. He first became involved in theatre while attending Bloomsburg State Teachers College following his military service, and then worked as a public school English teacher in Philadelphia for nearly a decade. While

---

<sup>751</sup> Hecht 202-3.

<sup>752</sup> Hecht 202.

<sup>753</sup> Hecht 205.

<sup>754</sup> Sills 87.

teaching full time, he started several community theatres in the city: first the Abbey Theatre, then the Circle in the City Theatre, and finally the 1200-seat Philadelphia Civic Theatre. In 1961, he had received a grant to develop an experimental theatre, called the Theatre Workshop, which produced fifteen original plays. He also established a professional theatre, the Cricket Playhouse. Jans had promised Sickinger “his own theatre and complete freedom as Artistic Director” in Chicago.<sup>755</sup> In a 2011 interview, Sickinger indicates that there may have been some misunderstanding about this: he thought he would have a theatre in the Loop, and went so far as to meet with the architect Louis Kahn about designing it. This was soon cleared up. “They didn’t have the money to build the big theatre in the Loop. So they said, we’re going to go into three neighborhoods. They were going to go into Belmont, and then the Parkway, and then I found the money, the guy to build the theatre at Parkway.”<sup>756</sup> Sickinger took over as head of the new Hull-House Association Theatre program on February 1, 1963.<sup>757</sup>

Sickinger and Jans created a proposal for the new theatre program that recommended four theatres of three hundred seats or less, which would perform classics, original plays and experimental work, while avoiding “show biz” fare. Musicals and opera were also proposed. There were to be drama classes for children and adults. Financially, the Hull-House Association would cover some initial costs, but the theatres were to be financially self-sufficient, supported by single-ticket and subscription sales, grants and fundraising. Sickinger was the only paid employee, everyone else was a volunteer. The theatres were to be opened one-by-one; if one

---

<sup>755</sup> Hecht 205-6.

<sup>756</sup> Sickinger, Robert. Personal interview. 21 May 2011.

<sup>757</sup> Hecht 206.



succeeded, the next proposed theatre would open.<sup>758</sup> In practice, two theatres opened immediately and within four years all were presenting regular seasons.<sup>759</sup> Theatre programming also included a playwriting workshop, a touring theatre, children's theatre, a chamber theatre group, a summer theatre camp, and a drama magazine.<sup>760</sup> The rapid growth of the program was due to its success, but may be part of the reason the program was short-lived: it became too much for one person to run.

"According to Sickinger, when he arrived in Chicago, theatrically it was 'a wilderness. . . there was nothing there.'"<sup>761</sup> He believed that he would be starting from scratch, in a city essentially without an experimental theatre scene, and he was ready to put in the necessary work. Hecht cites a proposal from the Hull-House archives, titled, "On the State of Theatre in Chicago," and written by Sickinger and Jans, that shows a unique take on the role of arts in the community. "The proposal's authors defined 'community' on a large scope. Though they spoke of the value of art to 'each neighborhood,' their ultimate conceptual definition of community was the city of Chicago as a whole." The proposal could serve as a mission statement for what Sickinger's theatre program ultimately did for the city:

We have a responsibility for developing interesting theatre which can influence and stimulate the neighborhoods in which we are located. We must create in each neighborhood an atmosphere that only the best in the theatre should be the standard, and with this will come the quickening of the consciousness of

---

<sup>758</sup> Hecht 207-8.

<sup>759</sup> The Hattie Callner Theatre in the Jane Addams Center opened in November 1963. The Leo Lerner Theatre at the Uptown Center was the last to open, in November 1967.

<sup>760</sup> Gray 95.

<sup>761</sup> Sills 87.

those being touched by art, a new realization of what Art can mean and what it means to be an artist. Theatre must flourish on a regional basis or it is not going to flourish at all.<sup>762</sup>

Sickinger remained remarkably consistent with this message of a theatre scene embedded within the life of the community at the neighborhood level; he espoused a similar sentiment in the 1965 *Chicago* magazine article, “Culture – Does Anyone Really Care?”

Many of the dispositions of the Off-Loop theatre scene came directly out of Hull-House Theatre. Perhaps most importantly, Sickinger developed an audience for challenging and avant-garde work. He actively cultivated an educated and affluent audience for his theatre; his audience was undoubtedly similar to that of the Playwrights Theatre Club in the 1950s, and in fact likely included some of the same people.<sup>763</sup> One of his first actions was to create an “advisory board,” ostensibly to determine theatre policy, but in practice it was intended to boost the prestige of the theatre by including wealthy and socially prominent people to lend the theatre legitimacy and, hopefully, a source of future donations.<sup>764</sup> He next began the Chamber Theatre, which presented staged readings of contemporary plays in the homes of Chicago’s arts patrons, for an invited audience, often accompanied by dinner and a discussion led by Sickinger.<sup>765</sup> Like Playwrights Theatre Club in the early 1950s, Sickinger’s play selection appealed to an educated audience, filling a void in Chicago’s theatre scene. “Sickinger’s artistic tastes inclined toward serious contemporary drama, often containing controversial political,

---

<sup>762</sup> Hecht 209-10.

<sup>763</sup> Playwrights Theatre Club was established by Paul Sills and is covered in that section.

<sup>764</sup> Hecht 211.

<sup>765</sup> Hecht 213.

social, or artistic critiques of the status quo.<sup>766</sup> Sills characterizes the Hull-House Theatre's audience as "primarily white, liberal and economically advantaged."<sup>767</sup> Gray makes the connection between Hull-House Theatre's audience and the Off-Loop scene; "Sickinger's Chamber Theatre developed the tastes of a prestigious local audience for new and experimental theatre. These adventurous theatregoers were, a decade later, eager and willing to venture forth into the bohemian neighborhood of Lincoln Avenue and support the struggling Off-Loop theatres of the 1970s."<sup>768</sup>

In addition to creating an audience, Sickinger also created the aesthetic that would come to be associated with Off-Loop theatre. In 1967, he said of his own dramaturgy, "I want the plays I do to have depth and meaning. This makes people think. When you assault them you make them curious. I want to hit my audience directly, no pussyfooting, no subterfuge."<sup>769</sup> Sickinger's play choices prefigure those of the later Off-Loop theatre movement. His choice of words - "No pussyfooting, no subterfuge" - are remarkably similar to the assertive, hypermasculine attitude of the Off-Loop theatre scene in the 1970s, as well as the aggressive language used to describe Chicago theatre in the press when it first came to national prominence. Sills states that Sickinger also favored "gritty realism, a style which would put Steppenwolf on the map some twenty years later."<sup>770</sup>

The first play produced under Sickinger's leadership was Josh Greenfield's *Clandestine on the Morning Line*, an Obie-winning play from 1961 that opened the Henry Booth Theatre on

---

<sup>766</sup> Gray 102.

<sup>767</sup> Sills 93.

<sup>768</sup> Gray 99.

<sup>769</sup> Komiss, Diane. "Chicagoans: Profiles of Theatrical Entrepreneurs, Bob Sickinger." *Chicago Magazine* Summer 1967: 36 – 40. Print. 36.

<sup>770</sup> Sills 93.

September 7, 1963.<sup>771</sup> Two months later, in November 1963, Sickinger directed Frank D. Gilroy's *Who Will Save the Plowboy* at the new Hattie Callner Theatre in the Jane Addams Center in Lakeview.<sup>772</sup> Despite the initial proposal that stated Hull-House would include "classics" in their repertoire, it primarily presented contemporary plays from Off-Broadway. In its five seasons, Hull-House presented Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*; Jack Gelber's *The Connection*; Edward Albee's *The Death of Bessie Smith*, *The American Dream*, and *Tiny Alice*; Athol Fugard's *The Blood Knot*; Kenneth A. Brown's *The Brig*; Harold Pinter's *The Dumbwaiter*, *A Slight Ache*, *The Lover*, and *The Collection*; Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*; Lanford Wilson's *Home Free*; Leroi Jones' *Dutchman* and *The Slave*; Pirandello's *The Man With the Flower in His Mouth*, Albert Camus' *Caligula*; James Baldwin's *The Amen Corner*; Venable Herndon's *When the Monkey Comes*; John Whiting's *The Devils*; John Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes*; William Hanley's *Slow Dance on the Killing Ground*; Joe Orton's *Entertaining Mr. Sloan*; Israel Horowitz's *The Indian Wants the Bronx* and *It's Called the Sugar Plum*, among many others.<sup>773</sup> Hecht notes that Sickinger selected plays based on his own tastes and preferences, not – as some within Hull-House might have wished – because of any perceived social benefit. "Their outspoken theatricality rejected the kind of reassuring morality which might have quieted some of Sickinger's opponents."<sup>774</sup>

Beyond developing an audience, Sickinger had to develop the talent pool. Children's theatre classes and the playwriting workshop, which Sickinger viewed as his greatest

---

<sup>771</sup> Gray 101; Hecht 215.

<sup>772</sup> Gray 100.

<sup>773</sup> Gray 102; Hecht 232 – 267.

<sup>774</sup> Hecht 293.

achievement, began in the Spring of 1963.<sup>775</sup> Sickinger stated “I thought the foundation of everything we’re going to be doing would be new playwrights. That’s exactly what it would be about. That is the heart of the theatre.”<sup>776</sup> The workshop began with eight members; soon grew to twenty, and Sickinger claims that there were over one hundred when he left town.<sup>777</sup> Although Hull-House only produced one play written at the workshop as part of the regular season, (*Kid’s Games* by Allan Bates in 1966) the Playwright’s Workshop served as a training ground for writers as well as directors, who gained experience staging new plays.<sup>778</sup> Sickinger recalled that one of the first plays that dealt with the Viet Nam war, *Penny Arcade*, written by then thirteen-year old David Stern, came out of the Playwright’s Workshop and had its first production directed by Paul Sills.<sup>779</sup> *Intermission* magazine was also a product of the Playwright’s Workshop: “Its prime purpose was to publish critical analyses of Playwright’s Workshop productions. However, its pages also announced and critiqued Hull-House, Chicago and sometimes New York theatre activity. Issues included poetry, short stories and reviews and could be bought either by subscription or during the intermissions of Hull-House Theatre performances (hence its name).<sup>780</sup>

Hull-House theatre did not have an acting ensemble, although Sickinger regularly worked with the same actors, which created a sense of ensemble and later served as the basis for charges of exclusivity.<sup>781</sup> Legendary Chicago actor Mike Nussbaum first worked at Hull-

---

<sup>775</sup> Hecht 212.

<sup>776</sup> Sickinger, Robert. Personal interview, 21 May 2011.

<sup>777</sup> Hecht 223.

<sup>778</sup> Hecht 244.

<sup>779</sup> Sickinger interview May 21, 2011. Stern’s play came to the attention of Lanford Wilson, who brought it to the attention of Joe Cino in New York. Cino’s death in 1967 prevented its production at Caffè Cino.

<sup>780</sup> Hecht 234.

<sup>781</sup> Hecht 245; Sills 99.

House in the summer of 1963, with the Chamber Theatre. “He, along with Bea Fredman, Bob Curry, Bill Terry, (...) Robert Kidder and Tito Shaw, formed the core of Bob Sickinger’s acting pool.”<sup>782</sup> Other members of this pool included Stuart Eckhaus, Marla Friedman, Bill Kelly, Diane Rudall, Harvey Rubin, Catita Lord, Roberta Custer, and Jim Jacobs – many of whom went on to become prominent in the Off-Loop theatre scene.<sup>783</sup> Sickinger was characterized as an encouraging director “. . . a kind man who builds ego rather than tears it down. The actors take suggestions well from him because he gives them well.”<sup>784</sup> Hecht states that “In part, he cast amateur actors as other directors cast professional actors – by their physical appropriateness for a particular role. But Sickinger’s special ability lay in coaxing strong performances from inexperienced actors.”<sup>785</sup> His skills as a director are somewhat debated, but what Sills describes as his “enormous charisma, and a larger than life quality” helped him draw amateur actors in and elicit the best out of them. Hull-House Theatre ran on Sickinger’s energy, drive, and perfectionism; this left its mark on the people he worked with, who carried it forward into their own subsequent careers. In this way, Sickinger influenced the habitus of Chicago theatre in regards to work ethic, commitment, and dedication.<sup>786</sup>

Donna Jackson, an actress and assistant to Sickinger, discussed how his high standards inspired everyone else to work at the top of their abilities:

If you showed up – he would work you so hard. Everybody that worked in his original company had another job. Jim Jacobs wrote ads. Mike Nussbaum had an

---

<sup>782</sup> Hecht 224.

<sup>783</sup> Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 126.

<sup>784</sup> Hecht 246.

<sup>785</sup> Hecht 245.

<sup>786</sup> Sills 101.

exterminating business. Everybody had a different job. . . they would work into the night, five, six o'clock in the morning, and go to work the next day. The thing about it was, no matter how hard you worked – you would work so hard on something, and he would say, “No it’s not right.” And you didn’t care, because you knew in the end the only thing he cared about was to make it right. It wasn’t about him. It was never about him. It was never about you. It was about art. And that’s what made him the man who created theater in Chicago.<sup>787</sup>

Sickinger not only trained the first generation of Off-Loop theatre artists, he also instilled a sense of community for many of them. This carried over into the Off-Loop theatre scene. In 1984, playwright David Mamet, who had worked in Hull-House theatre as a teenager, talked about Sickinger’s influence:

The company was the community; high-school students, housewives, businessmen and women, working people. We bathed in his pride and we became proud of ourselves. We were proud of ourselves in some nameless way. . . we didn’t call ourselves artists, but we knew we were *something*. We were proud to be engaged in the business of a collaborative art.<sup>788</sup>

That Sickinger’s Hull-House established many of the dispositions of Off-Loop theatre becomes evident when one considers Mamet’s theatre company, St. Nicholas, established in 1974. St. Nicholas was one of the first successful Off-Loop theatre ensembles and served as a model for

---

<sup>787</sup> Sills 85.

<sup>788</sup> Mamet, David. “Why I Write for Chicago Theater.” *Vanity Fair* November 1984: 52. Print. 52.

numerous other groups, including Steppenwolf.<sup>789</sup> That Mamet cites Sickinger as his inspiration, speaks to Sickinger's influence and primacy, and the relational and interactional nature of Off-Loop theatre's habitus.

Sickinger's work with his actors paid off almost immediately: Richard Christiansen, then a critic at the *Chicago Daily News* and writing in the environment of the Mayor's Committee for Economic and Cultural Development, praised the quality of their first production, *Who Will Save the Plowboy*: "For once, in these times of do-nothing cultural committees, a group of people entrusted with financial means and social responsibility truly has done something about theater in Chicago, and done it well. They have built their theater, they have found their director, and they set us all an example."<sup>790</sup> Forty years later, Christiansen considers this production a "defining moment" and a "revelatory experience": "In its energy, passion, and commitment, it set the pattern for the bountiful Chicago theater work of the future. Suddenly and powerfully, it proved to me for the first of many times that small mattered, that a piece of theater in a 110-seat converted bowling alley could be wonderful, big time."<sup>791</sup> Two years after *Who Will Save the Plowboy*, *Sun-Times* critic Glenna Syse reviewed Albee's *Tiny Alice*: "With this production, this theatre has come of age with a maturity that belies its youth. From now on, the label "amateur" does not apply and, from now on in, for better or worse, the productions deserve to be judged by only the highest standards."<sup>792</sup>

---

<sup>789</sup> Based on his research into St. Nicholas, Hecht suggests that the company was very consciously modeled on Sickinger's Hull-House Theatre.

<sup>790</sup> Christiansen, Richard. "A Hit, A Hit, A Hit!" *Chicago Daily News* 16 November 1963. Qtd. in Gray, 101.

<sup>791</sup> Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 127.

<sup>792</sup> Syse, Glenna. "Hull House in New League." *Chicago Sun-Times* 30 November 1954. Qtd. in Hecht 243.



The Hull-House Theatre program also developed production facilities, which had a lasting impact. The theatre in the Jane Addams Center at 3212 N. Broadway, known as the Hattie Callner Theatre, was the “flagship” of the system. It was a 110-seat thrust theatre, created out of a space that formerly housed a bowling alley.<sup>793</sup> The first theatre to open, however, was at Henry Booth House, located in the basement of a high rise in the Harold Ickes public housing project in Bronzeville, on September 7, 1963. In keeping with the racial climate of the times, productions at the Henry Booth (later renamed the Underground theatre), were often ignored by the press and poorly attended.<sup>794</sup> In July 1965, the third theatre opened at the Parkway Community Center on 67<sup>th</sup> St.<sup>795</sup> The final space to open was the Leo Lerner Theatre, located at the Uptown Center in the fall of 1967. It was a 144-seat thrust stage, and was intended to be used for musicals.<sup>796</sup> The Jane Addams, Leo Lerner, and Parkway theatres were all later utilized by Off-Loop theatres groups: the Jane Addams Center was used by June Pyskacek in the mid-1979s, then became the first Chicago home of Steppenwolf from 1980 – 1982. The Organic used the Leo Lerner from 1973 until 1977, as did St. Nicholas and Jackie Taylor’s Black Ensemble Theatre. The Parkway was the home of XBAG through the 1970s.<sup>797</sup> Even in its absence, Sickinger’s Hull-House Theatre benefitted the Off-Loop theatre scene in that it left behind small, functional theatre spaces. In addition, the Jane Addams theatre was created out of a repurposed space, creating both an aesthetic and a template for numerous other storefront theatre conversions.

---

<sup>793</sup> Hecht 213.

<sup>794</sup> Hecht 215, 253.

<sup>795</sup> Hecht 237.

<sup>796</sup> Hecht 261.

<sup>797</sup> Gray 114-5.

The Hull-House theatres were not created equal: the Jane Addams center was the most high-profile and financially successful of the four. Sickinger directed most of the plays produced there, it received the most publicity, and was the best attended.<sup>798</sup> The Henry Booth and Parkway theatres were considered the “black” theatres; the Henry Booth, located in a public housing project, received the least amount of press attention. The Parkway fared somewhat better – shows there were often favorably reviewed in the press – but both theatres struggled for an audience.<sup>799</sup> Part of the problem was perceptual: within the African-American community, the sentiment existed that the theatres were not really part of the community, but rather were being imposed upon them from outside. The racial climate of the times also had a detrimental effect for attendance: audiences for both theatres were estimated to be about twenty percent white, but in the wake of riots that broke out after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., these numbers declined.<sup>800</sup> Hecht notes that the play selection created unease within the African-American community, “Both theatres favored dramas which expressed outrage at America’s abuse of Blacks. Representatives of the Black neighborhood, fearing the Parkway’s play selection because of its potential for provoking civil unrest, complained, and their pleas reached the Hull-House Association’s Board of Trustees...”<sup>801</sup> Sills describes the dilemma this created:

The lack of support by African American audiences subsequently made the mission of the Hull House organizers seem inaccessible and far away from the

---

<sup>798</sup> Hecht 216

<sup>799</sup> Gray 108.

<sup>800</sup> Hecht 254.

<sup>801</sup> Hecht 255.

intended goals of inclusion and arts for everyone. Sickinger was also in a bind economically; by using the money from Chicago's upper-class liberals who provided artistic and financial support to the productions at the Jane Addams Theater, he was hoping to subsidize the money-losing operations at the Henry Booth Theatre and the Parkway. This economic balancing act would prove to be very difficult to sustain.<sup>802</sup>

The plays at the Booth and Parkway suffered from a lack of community support: the community saw them as imposed upon them from the outside. In microcosm, it was the lesson that Chicago's Off-Loop theatre scene was in the process of learning: the art of a community must come out of and speak to the community itself.

The plays at the Booth and Parkway became a financial liability. However, Sickinger was creative when it came to fundraising; in 1964, he attempted to capitalize on successful shows by moving them to the Sheridan Theatre, a 269-seat former movie house at 717 W. Sheridan. The plan was for the Sheridan to house open runs and revivals. The Kate Maremont Foundation agreed to underwrite production expenses, and the income would help to support the entire Hull-House theatre program.<sup>803</sup> The January 1964 production of Jack Gelber's *The Connection* at the Jane Addams Center moved to the Sheridan in April 1964, followed in October by a revival of *Who Will Save the Plowboy*, and in December by Athol Fugard's *The Blood Knot*.<sup>804</sup> However, unlike other Hull-House shows, *The Blood Knot* used professional actors on an Equity contract, and in so doing was considered a commercial enterprise. Because of this, the

---

<sup>802</sup> Sills 98.

<sup>803</sup> Hecht 221.

<sup>804</sup> Gray 104.

Maremont Foundation pulled its support. Sickinger could not continue to operate the Sheridan without foundation support, and Hull-House plays at the Sheridan ceased.<sup>805</sup> Sickinger's plans for the Sheridan were ambitious, but the plays at the Sheridan are symbolic of his entire Hull-House program: enthusiastic early success, rapid expansion, followed by a quick collapse due to exhaustion and overreach.

Sickinger was successful in attracting a liberal, educated, monied audience to avant-garde theatre on the north side, but it was not enough to support the entire program. In 1967, Hecht reports that Hull-House Theatre's budget was \$150,000, \$100,000 of which came from the box office.<sup>806</sup> Even if every production at the Jane Addams Center productions was successful (and they were not), Hull-House was too dependent on box office income to continue this way. With the Parkway and Henry Booth losing money and drawing criticism from the communities they were intended to serve, both were forced to close during the spring and summer of 1968.<sup>807</sup>

In addition to its many programs, Hull-House Theatre ran a successful children's theatre and touring theatre program. The children's theatre program started in the 1964-65 season, led by Sickinger's wife, Selma.<sup>808</sup> She asked John Stasey, a member of the Playwright's Workshop, to create a children's show: he developed the "Captain Marbles Squadron," a set of characters who had adventures every Saturday from 1964 until 1968 on the stage of the Jane Addams center.<sup>809</sup> The shows were created through improvisation, and featured original music by Ricky

---

<sup>805</sup> Hecht 231.

<sup>806</sup> Hecht 257.

<sup>807</sup> Hecht 264-5.

<sup>808</sup> Selma Sickinger was Bob's unpaid partner in running Hull-House Theatre.

<sup>809</sup> Hecht 236.

Jans, Paul Jans teenage son. *Captain Marbles* was later revived by David Mamet's St. Nicholas theatre in the 1970s. The popularity of the children's shows led to a touring theatre, which sent Captain Marbles and friends to Wisconsin and Illinois.<sup>810</sup> The touring theatre soon expanded to include plays suitable for high school, college, and civic groups: *In White America*, *Man Without a Country*, *Contrasts in Shakespeare*, *John F. Kennedy*, and *Mary Poppins*.<sup>811</sup> This proved even more popular, and during the 1966-67 season, 8 touring companies gave three thousand performances throughout the Midwest. Unfortunately, the expenses of such an extensive touring program outpaced any potential income, and the Hull-House Association board cancelled the touring program at the start of the 1967-68 season.<sup>812</sup>

The entire Hull-House theatre program was eventually undone by financial losses, although there were other factors involved, including charges that the program was inconsistent with Hull-House's mission. Sickinger was also undoubtedly burning out. Since starting the program, he did most of the directing for shows at the Jane Addams and the Leo Lerner theatre, which opened in November 1967. The program had grown to four theatres running full seasons, a touring theatre, a children's theatre, the playwrights group, and chamber theatre in just five seasons. By the 1967-68 season, there were fewer productions in the season with longer runs, and Sickinger directed less frequently. It is reasonable to assume that Sickinger was exhausted, and it appears that the quality of productions suffered as a result.<sup>813</sup> The season opener, *Fortune and Men's Eyes* at the Jane Addams center, received

---

<sup>810</sup> Gray 107.

<sup>811</sup> Hecht 248.

<sup>812</sup> Gray 107.

<sup>813</sup> Hecht 265.

poor reviews, and *Slow Dance on the Killing Ground* at the Parkway drew little audience.<sup>814</sup> The financial situation continued to be an issue; in November 1968, Hull-House Theatre sent out an appeal for donations – this is after the touring theatre had been cancelled the previous season and the Booth and Parkway had closed.<sup>815</sup> Hull-House Executive Director Paul Jans, who had hired Sickinger and was his biggest supporter, came into conflict with the Association Board over the theatre program; he eventually lost the support of the board and resigned in April 1969.<sup>816</sup> Sickinger resigned a month later.<sup>817</sup> At issue was the role of the arts within a social service agency; Jans supported Sickinger’s efforts, but Sickinger was viewed by the board as not supporting the mission of Hull-House as a social services agency.

Sickinger left Chicago following his ouster from Hull-House. Although there were some efforts to continue, Hull-House theatre effectively ceased in 1969, just as the Off-Loop theatre scene was beginning. Sickinger is widely recognized as the one responsible for creating the conditions – instilling the dispositions – of what was to come. Gray characterizes Sickinger as “planting the seeds,” and Hecht as “laying the foundation” for Off-Loop theatre.<sup>818</sup> Sickinger’s Hull-House Theatre succeeded in reshaping the landscape of Chicago theatre: literally, Sickinger created the field, to use Bourdieu’s terminology.<sup>819</sup> Gray cites “His vision of neighborhood theatres sprouting all over the city inspired the explosion of professional theatre in Chicago that was to come.” The field of Off-Loop theatre came to be that of small, neighborhood-based theatre ensembles staging gritty, contemporary plays on stages set up in converted commercial

---

<sup>814</sup> Gray 110.

<sup>815</sup> Hecht 269.

<sup>816</sup> Hecht 271.

<sup>817</sup> Hecht 272.

<sup>818</sup> Gray 115; Hecht 278.

<sup>819</sup> Sills 88.

spaces. Hecht credits Sickinger with creating a “testing ground” for Chicago theatre artists, and for building an engaged audience base, both of which created the conditions for the Off-Loop theatre scene.<sup>820</sup> Some of the most significant figures associated of the early Off-Loop theatre movement – playwright David Mamet, actors Mike Nussbaum and Roberta Custer, Warren Casey and Jim Jacobs of *Grease* fame - were trained by Sickinger. His work ethic, perfectionism, and dedication to his craft were deeply ingrained in those he trained, and in turn passed on to others within Chicago theatre, until these qualities became some of the defining traits of Off-Loop theatre.<sup>821</sup> Finally, Sickinger created facilities – the Jane Addams, Parkway, and Leo Lerner theatres - that became home to later Off-Loop theatre groups.

Early on, Sickinger realized that Chicago collectively lacked confidence in its own abilities, and that in order for the arts to evolve in the city, this issue needed to be addressed. In the 1964 *Chicago* magazine article he referred to the Tribune Tower building, which features rocks from famous sites around the world embedded into the side of the building at street level, as a metaphor for theatre in the city:

On my way here I stopped in front of the Chicago Tribune. A friend was with me, a Chicagoan. He showed me the rocks Mr. McCormick had placed there from all different countries, and this suggested to me the cultural atmosphere of the city. I think sometimes the problem with Chicago is that its emphasis, its horizons, its outlook, are somewhere else. We talk about developing something here, but we want to get it from somewhere else for some strange reason. Like putting all

---

<sup>820</sup> Hecht 279.

<sup>821</sup> Gray 3.

those rocks in front of the Tribune building. Chicago has tremendous resources. But what has this city ever done to develop its own resources, to nurture them?<sup>822</sup>

While Sickinger can be credited with creating the habitus for Off-Loop theatre in terms of a work ethic, facilities, and an aesthetic, perhaps his most important contribution was showing Chicago's theatre community what it was capable of doing. In a 2011 interview, Sickinger revisited the story about Tribune Tower, adding that his guide at the time had also said, "Now that you're here, you're going to change the rocks. There will be a rock from the South Side, there'll be a rock from Rogers Park."<sup>823</sup> Sickinger, by developing resources, nurturing talent, and demanding the best, succeeded in altering the city's perception of itself. He showed Chicago that it could produce high quality theatre. Sickinger's addition to the "rock" story, nearly fifty years later, came about in an interview conducted at the first Chicago Theatre History Symposium, where he was honored for his contributions to the city's theatre scene.

### **Paul Sills: from Playwrights Theatre Club to Body Politic**

While Bob Sickinger "planted the seeds," Paul Sills can be thought to have "turned up the soil" that allowed Off-Loop theatre to grow. Sills is a complicated figure in Chicago theatre history; his contributions to Off-Loop theatre are often overshadowed by his role in establishing the city's improvisational theatre scene. Sills had something of a genius for starting and then abandoning theatre projects, often at the point where they became successful. Before he founded The Compass Players in 1955, and later Second City, Sills gave Chicago the model for

---

<sup>822</sup> Jacobi 64.

<sup>823</sup> Sickinger, Robert. Personal interview, 21 May 2011.



what an Off-Loop theatre ensemble would look like: the Playwrights Theatre Club.<sup>824</sup> Although it only lasted two years – from 1953 until 1955 - in its brief existence, Playwrights established and enacted many of the dispositions that would become part of the habitus of Off-Loop theatre: notably, the idea of a tight-knit theatre ensemble formed by a group of college friends, producing alternative, non-commercial theatre in a converted space, and aspiring to Equity status. The Playwrights ensemble included some who went on to greater fame, such as Ed Asner and Barbara Harris, several who later became part of the Compass and Second City, such as Mike Nichols and Elaine May, and many people who would become significant figures within the Off-Loop theatre scene, notably Byrne and Joyce (Hiller) Piven who went on to found the Piven Theatre Workshop, and Sheldon Patinkin, who became a director, author, and chair of the theatre program at Columbia College Chicago.<sup>825</sup> Playwrights struggled to “turn Equity,” and also like many Off-Loop theatre companies to come, was eventually shuttered by a visit from the fire marshal, never to reopen.<sup>826</sup> Despite its brief life, Playwrights made its mark - the ensemble essentially enacted the Steppenwolf Scenario twenty years before the Off-Loop scene existed.

While Playwrights is important as a company, founder Paul Sills’ influence extends far beyond the brief lifespan of the group. He is best remembered for his contributions to the improv scene, although he began his career by doing “straight” theatre with Playwrights and revisited the idea of a repertory theatre company several times throughout his career in

---

<sup>824</sup>Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 100.

<sup>825</sup> Barker, Jeff A. “Paul Sills' Life in the Theatre: The First Half Century (1927-1979).” MA Thesis. Northern Illinois U, 1981. Print. 17.

<sup>826</sup> Coleman, Janet. *The Compass*. New York: Knopf: 1990. Print. 81.

Chicago.<sup>827</sup> Furthermore, his forays into political activism, community-building, and the counterculture of the 1960s and early 1970s led to the founding of the Body Politic in Lincoln Park in 1969, which marks the beginning of the Off-Loop theatre scene. Sills is the one who reportedly encouraged Stuart Gordon to move his Organic Theatre to Chicago from Madison, WI in 1970: "Sure, come on down. I'm here on Lincoln Avenue at the Body Politic; Kingston Mines is just up the street. When you get here, we'll have a scene."<sup>828</sup> Sills is often described as having had an evangelical or priest-like quality when it came to theatre - an ability to get people to do and try new things. Richard Christiansen notes, "For all his faults, and he could be curt and coarse and cruel in his dealings, he was the great innovator."<sup>829</sup> This section will focus on Sills' career as it pertains to the Off-Loop theatre scene, centering on Playwrights Theatre Club, Playwrights at Second City, Game Theatre, Second City Repertory, Story Theatre, and his role in founding Body Politic. His contributions to the city's improvisational comedy scene are well-documented elsewhere and will be mentioned here only as far as they are relevant to the discussion of Off-Loop theatre.

Sills had the ultimate Chicago theatre pedigree: his mother, Viola Spolin, literally wrote the book on improvisation. Spolin's *Improvisation for the Theatre* was first published in 1963, but she began developing her methods and ideas while a student of Neva Boyd's Recreational Training School, which was housed at Hull-House in the 1920s.<sup>830</sup> Boyd, a social worker, sought to teach instructors how to direct recreational activities in schools and other institutional

---

<sup>827</sup> Feldman, Lee G. "A Brief History of Improvisational Theatre in the United States." *Yale/theater* 5.2 (1974): 128 – 151. Print. 134.

<sup>828</sup> Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 162.

<sup>829</sup> Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 99.

<sup>830</sup> Barker 1.

settings, using children's play as a path for group socialization.<sup>831</sup> Spolin applied Boyd's ideas on group play to theatre, creating "...a process in which the games were used to help actors relate to other people and to hear their surroundings."<sup>832</sup> Sills would eventually apply his mother's theatre games, which were intended as a rehearsal technique, to creating performance itself, resulting in the improvisationally-developed revues of the Compass Players and Second City, and later his own Story Theater, which combined an improv aesthetic with narrative storytelling.

Sills was born in Chicago in 1927; Spolin separated from his father in the early 1930s, and he had a somewhat bohemian upbringing as his mother pursued a career as an actress in the 1930s.<sup>833</sup> After high school, Sills joined the merchant marines, then enlisted in the Army in 1946. After two years of service, he enrolled at the University of Chicago in 1948.<sup>834</sup> The University had no formal theatre program, so Sills acted and directed with student theatre groups. During the 1951-52 school year, he began leading a series of acting workshops using his mother's theatre games in preparation for a production of Jean Cocteau's *The Typewriter*.<sup>835</sup> The cast included students Mike Nichols and Joyce Hiller (later Piven), with Sheldon Patinkin running the light board. Rehearsals lasted six months.<sup>836</sup> The show received a favorable review from the *Chicago Daily News*, and this convinced Sills to pursue a career in theatre.<sup>837</sup> This led

---

<sup>831</sup> Hecht 179-80.

<sup>832</sup> Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 99.

<sup>833</sup> Robertson, Campbell. "Paul Sills, 80, Guru of the Improv Stage." *New York Times (1923-Current file)* June 4, 2008: 23. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 May 2018; Barker 3 – 4; Stavru, William N. "Second City and Story Theatre Founder Paul Sills." *The Bardian* Nov. 1996. N. Pag. [www.paulsills.com](http://www.paulsills.com). Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

<sup>834</sup> Barker 6.

<sup>835</sup> Coleman 54.

<sup>836</sup> Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 99

<sup>837</sup> Barker 10.

to another series of acting workshops that culminated in a production of Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* on campus in May 1953.<sup>838</sup>

For this production, Sills seems to have applied his mother's improvisational theatre games aesthetically; in other words, not just as a way to build ensemble, but as a way to incorporate the use of mime, shared storytelling, and the feeling of spontaneity inherent in improv games, to the production itself. Sills did so in a somewhat misguided attempt to create the sense of Brechtian alienation. Kathleen Sills<sup>839</sup> notes that Sills and his colleagues had a limited and somewhat flawed understanding of Brechtian theory: "Clearly, Sills and Shepherd were attracted to the "idea" of the exaggeration or distortion of character, however, their understanding of Brecht's aesthetic would have been sorely limited, given their dependence on Bentley's early explication of the "epic theatre."<sup>840</sup> In 1953, Eric Bentley's essays and translations of Brecht's plays were the only source available in English. Martin Esslin and John Willetts work did not appear until 1959.<sup>841</sup> Despite their lack of knowledge, Sills found something even more exciting in the process. Sheldon Patinkin recounts:

I don't know that we knew the terminology then, but that was truly an ensemble production. All twenty people in the cast were on stage from the beginning to the end of the play. Everyone played everything, basically. It was staged marvelously. It used a lot of mime, and I guess it was really the first Story Theatre. What Paul didn't do then that he would do now is divide up the

---

<sup>838</sup> Barker 12.

<sup>839</sup> Kathleen Sills is no relation to Paul Sills.

<sup>840</sup> David Shepherd was Sills' producing partner in both Playwrights and the Compass Players. Sills 35.

<sup>841</sup> Sills 31.

narrations with the individual characters taking their own parts of the narration as well as the dialogue. In terms of the former of the use of mime versus props, of the costume pieces, and the whole general ambiance of the thing, it was the beginnings of The Second City and Story Theatre.<sup>842</sup>

During the extended rehearsal period for *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Sills became acquainted with David Shepherd, a New Yorker who had an idea to start a politically-oriented cabaret theatre intended for a blue-collar audience, based on the German cabarets of the 1920s. Although not a student at University of Chicago, he became part of Sills' workshops. Sills soon convinced Shepherd to abandon his cabaret idea and instead help establish an ensemble theatre company: Playwrights Theatre Club. With a third producer, Eugene Troobnik, they obtained a space on the second floor of a building at 1560 N. LaSalle which had formerly housed a Chinese restaurant, and converted it into a thrust stage with seating for 125.<sup>843</sup>

Playwrights Theatre Club was formally led by the triumvirate of Sills, Shepherd and Troobnik as producers, but artistically, it was all Sills.<sup>844</sup> The group was designated a "club," as Patinkin explained, "We were the first not-for-profit theatre in town, and the only way you could do it at all at that point was to become a club. The people who came to the theatre had to become members of the club. You could buy subscriptions, but a membership could also entitle you to just one time. The membership fee was the price of the ticket."<sup>845</sup> The 501(c)3 non-profit organization designation did not exist at the time, so Playwrights was forced by

---

<sup>842</sup> Barker 12.

<sup>843</sup> Sills 32-3.

<sup>844</sup> Eugene Troobnik eventually left and was replaced by Bernie Sahlins as a producer.

<sup>845</sup> Barker 15.

necessity to operate as a commercial enterprise. The “club” designation also allowed the company to evade the city’s restrictive building codes pertaining to theatres, at least for a while.<sup>846</sup>

Ensemble members came from the University of Chicago student theatre groups. The ensemble had approximately 20 members, and included (at various times) Bill Alton, Ed Asner, Rolf and Josephine Forsberg, Barbara Harris, Anthony Holland, Zohra Lampert, Elaine May, Mike Nichols, Tom O’Horgan, Sheldon Patinkin, and Joyce and Byrne Piven.<sup>847</sup> Members were paid between \$10 and \$20 a week, depending on their circumstances; Patinkin notes that he was paid only \$5 because he was living at home at the time. “That didn’t even cover car fare, as I recall. And I also tried to bring food from home a lot, because mother worried about us all. It was a community, it really was, and several people slept in the theatre.”<sup>848</sup> Ensemble members took part in all aspects of production, building sets, maintaining the theatre and doing publicity and administrative work. In terms of the habitus of Off-Loop theatre, Playwrights set the stage for how numerous Chicago theatre ensembles would operate.

Dramaturgically and aesthetically, the company was both influenced by the Off-Broadway movement as well as their own naivete. Sills was interested in Brecht’s work and theories, while Shepherd still harbored hopes of an ideologically-based theatre that would engage directly with its audience. Into this mix, Sills brought Spolin’s improvisational techniques into rehearsals:

---

<sup>846</sup> Coleman 57.

<sup>847</sup> Barker 17.

<sup>848</sup> Sills 36.

Sills and Shepherd were clearly influenced by Bentley's writings on Brecht, which spoke to their own interest in creating a new kind of vitality in the theatre. The vigor that they sought was indelibly connected to the liveliness and spontaneity found in the Spolin theater games that Sills taught his actors. The Playwrights then grafted its understanding of Brechtian theory onto its own particular rubric of improvisation, and physical approaches to comedy. The Playwrights approach worked to the extent that no one around them (either critics or audiences) were able to correct their vision.<sup>849</sup>

In just two years, they presented twenty-seven plays, including Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *The Threepenny Opera*, Shaw's *Widowers' Houses*, Schnitzler's *Round Dance*, Büchner's *Woyzeck*, Jonson's *Volpone*, Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Chekhov's *The Sea Gull*, as well as *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Oedipus Rex*, and O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*.<sup>850</sup>

Plays typically ran for two to three weeks, five nights a week, with few "dark weeks." In the summer of 1954, they produced a four-play Shakespeare festival which was intended to take place in the courtyard of a building on Lake Shore Drive, but this ran afoul of city zoning regulations. Instead, Playwrights moved to 1205 N. Dearborn, a second-floor space above a restaurant, which seated three hundred and became their home for their second season.<sup>851</sup> In both locations, plays were produced with minimal scenery on a thrust stage.

---

<sup>849</sup> Sills 64.

<sup>850</sup> Sills 38-56.

<sup>851</sup> Sills 50.

Playwrights garnered an audience, characterized as "... an intellectual elite composed of urban, polite, and well-read people" and benefitted from the fact that they had no competition: Kathleen Sills notes that they were the only "... non-school, non-community, non-park district theater with its own space (albeit rudimentarily equipped.)"<sup>852</sup> Minnie Galatzer's school had closed in 1952 and her next local effort – a production of *The Crucible* under the name American Cavalcade Theatre, did not occur until 1958. Christiansen notes that Playwrights succeeded when it did because "... they presented work outside the mainstream of show business commerce (. . . ) and to have them presented in an often inventive, striking manner was manna from heaven for devoted theatregoers."<sup>853</sup>

During their second season, ensemble members began to join Actors Equity: Kathleen Sills notes that about half of the twenty-five ensemble members were in the union by the time the company folded. This was viewed by critics at the time as legitimizing the company, Sills quotes *Daily News* critic Sydney Harris that joining Equity would "give their productions a more professional patina;" but then as now, union membership was a mixed blessing. Equity minimum was \$45 a week at that time, and Equity ensemble members were asked to give their wages back to the theatre "as needed, which was frequently."<sup>854</sup> Within the contemporary Off-Loop theatre scene, an ensemble "turning Equity" – i.e. having ensemble members who are in the union, which requires that the company operate on an Equity contract – is viewed as a significant achievement and a mark of professionalism. It is also risky because it requires that Equity members be paid a salary, at least officially. Donating one's paycheck back to the

---

<sup>852</sup> Coleman 57; Sills 33-4.

<sup>853</sup> Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 104.

<sup>854</sup> Sills 50.



company is a practice that continues to this day in Off-Loop theatre. Playwrights Theatre Club may have been the first Chicago ensemble to do this; it certainly was not the last. This situation and practice has also become part of the habitus.

The ensemble began to fracture during their second season. In February 1955, several members moved to New York to pursue theatre careers. In March, the space at 1205 N. Dearborn was closed by order of the Chicago Fire Department. Under the Chicago Municipal Building Code at the time, there was essentially no way for a small, storefront-type theatre to exist legally. The company tried to fight the matter in court, arguing that they were a club and therefore exempt from the regulations for theatres, but lost in the end. The restrictive building codes would not be resolved until 1973.<sup>855</sup> Their final three productions, *Oedipus Rex*, *Juno and the Paycock*, and *Hamlet*, occurred in rented spaces.<sup>856</sup> Sills began to lose interest in the company in 1954, spending a month in Los Angeles that year.<sup>857</sup> After his return, the last show he directed at Playwrights was *Macbeth*, in February 1955.<sup>858</sup> Barker quotes Bernie Sahlins, by this point a producer of the company, "...the energy and money (*i.e. to continue*) did not exist, especially the first . . . If Paul had wanted to do it, it could have been done."<sup>859</sup> Sills had received a Fulbright award to study in England for the 1955–56 academic year.<sup>860</sup> With no space, a \$20,000 debt, and ensemble members moving on with their lives and careers,

---

<sup>855</sup> "Change in Municipal Code: Daley Boost to Theaters." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* May 23, 1973: B1. ProQuest. Web. 26 May 2018.

<sup>856</sup> Sills 59-60.

<sup>857</sup> Barker 37

<sup>858</sup> Sills 57.

<sup>859</sup> Barker 44.

<sup>860</sup> Cassidy, Claudia. "On the Aisle." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923 – 1963)* May 2, 1955: 1. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

“Playwrights had died with a whimper.”<sup>861</sup> All of these factors in Playwrights Theatre Club’s history - actors turning Equity and needing to leave Chicago to pursue professional work, harassment by city officials, and ensembles dissolving as member’s priorities shift – have since become part of the shared narrative of Off-Loop theatre ensembles. Over time, some parts of the habitus have changed: the need for actors to leave town to have professional careers has lessened, and the Municipal Building Code has been rewritten several times to accommodate the city’s theatre community; but these moments in Playwrights Theatre Club history would come to be shared experiences as the Off-Loop scene grew in the 1970s and 1980s. In this way, Playwrights was a pioneering company, perhaps the first Off-Loop theatre ensemble.

As Playwrights was winding down, David Shepherd revisited his idea for a cabaret theatre dealing in politics and current events, and the Compass Players were born. Sills was initially not interested, but was soon drawn into the project. Sills asked his mother to teach an improvisation workshop, from which the first Compass cast was selected. The Compass Players performed a mix of commedia-style improvised plays based on scenarios, scripted scenes, and “Living Newspapers,” which featured cast members reading aloud and commenting on newspaper articles. Located in a bar in the Hyde Park neighborhood near University of Chicago, the Compass opened in the summer of 1955, performing a new show every week. Sills worked with the company for their first ten weeks, then left for Europe. While he was away, Shepherd mismanaged the company; first by hiring professional comedians rather than performers schooled in improv, and then by relocating the group twice. The cast changes altered the tone of the group, and the multiple moves distanced the theatre from its original audience. Sills

---

<sup>861</sup> Barker 45.

returned to Chicago in 1956 and attempted to remedy the situation, but was unable to do so. Compass ended in the spring of 1957: "It had simply lost its foundation. It had left its ideals and had left the audience that found identity there."<sup>862</sup>

During the 1956–57 season, Sills and Shepherd's producing partner in Playwrights, Bernard Sahlins, attempted to start a professional repertory theatre company based at the Studebaker theatre. In March 1957, as Compass was ending, Sills was asked to step in on short notice to take over directing a production of *Lysistrata* after the original director bowed out unexpectedly.<sup>863</sup> It received terrible reviews; Claudia Cassidy headlined hers with "This may be the worst 'Lysistrata' since the Athenian premiere" and placed most of the blame on Sills.<sup>864</sup> The Studebaker project had been intended as a professional regional repertory theatre, but was troubled from the beginning and never quite rose to the occasion. It lasted a single season, and *Lysistrata* was one of the final shows. Despite the negative reviews and ultimate failure of the venture, Sills' willingness to direct and participate in the project, as well as Sahlins' involvement, speak to their shared commitment to staging scripted theatre, a commitment which remained evident through the 1960s at The Second City.

Following the *Lysistrata* debacle, Sills went first to New York, then California seeking work, before returning to Chicago in 1958. Once back, he reconnected with Sahlins and another producer, Howard Alk, and founded The Second City. Unlike Playwrights and Compass, which were established on some measure of idealism, The Second City was intended as a

---

<sup>862</sup> Barker 67.

<sup>863</sup> "Studebaker Bookings Shuffled." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 10, 1957: 1. ProQuest. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

<sup>864</sup> Cassidy, Claudia. "On the Aisle." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 13, 1957: 1. ProQuest. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

commercial, money-making venture from the beginning. The group debuted December 16, 1959, located in a former Chinese laundry at 1842 N. Wells.<sup>865</sup> It proved to be successful almost immediately, and Barker cites Bernie Sahlins' observation that Sills, "...began to lose interest after about the third show, partially due to the fact that the risk had gone out of the project."<sup>866</sup> Perhaps in response to Sills' restlessness, in May 1961, The Second City created a second performance space next door at 1846 N. Wells. "It was to become a showcase for experimental plays and was nostalgically christened Playwrights at Second City."<sup>867</sup>

The new space seated 225 in a cabaret setting, with drinks and food available throughout the show.<sup>868</sup> The first production, Jules Feiffer's *The Explainers*, received a less enthusiastic review than the space itself: "This cabaret-theater is going to be an interesting, an important, and possibly a stimulating addition to the Chicago night scene."<sup>869</sup> The second production, *Big Deal*, was based on John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. It was a musical satire created through improvisation by the cast, based on a scenario credited to Sills, Sahlins, and David Shepherd. William Leonard of the *Tribune* liked it: "It's a shrewd and cutting, topical and telling edition, set in Chicago of 1961, and it's a show as entertaining as it is bitter." The topicality of the show and its home-grown creation seemed to be its most salient features:

Such an 'improvisational' experiment may be important, but it's less vital to a ticket buyer than the fact that the Old Town company has come up with the first meritorious all-Chicago professional stage show within the memory of man – and

---

<sup>865</sup> Barker 70-9.

<sup>866</sup> Barker 86.

<sup>867</sup> Barker 93.

<sup>868</sup> Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 119.

<sup>869</sup> Leonard, William. "Playhouse is the Thing at Second City." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 10, 1961: 1. ProQuest. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

in a cabaret where the coffee, whiskey, and food service goes on during the performance.<sup>870</sup>

Leonard's enthusiasm is based largely on the fact that the play seemed organic to the city itself – it dealt with local politics and was created by local actors – and seems prescient in that this would become one of the dispositions contributing to the early habitus of Off-Loop theatre; Chicago audiences enjoyed seeing themselves and their city portrayed onstage. David Mamet's early plays all take place in Chicago, and the Organic became known in the late 1970s and early 1980s for ensemble-created plays such as *Bleacher Bums*, *Cops*, and *E/R*, based on life in Chicago.

Sills' restlessness took over again; he left town once *Big Deal* opened, and never directed for Playwrights at Second City again.<sup>871</sup> Productions of Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* and *The Death of Bessie Smith*, Jean Genet's *The Maids*, *Krapp's Last Tape* by Beckett and Pinter's *The Caretaker* all played in the space, but Sills was not part of these shows, and Playwrights at Second City languished in his absence.<sup>872</sup> In 1962, The Second City and Playwrights switched theatres, with The Second City revue taking over the larger Playwrights house.<sup>873</sup> By the mid-1960s, the second space had been turned into a "... nonalcoholic night club with a teen-aged cast doing numbers from old Second City revues."<sup>874</sup> Playwrights at Second City can best be thought of as an experimental side-project to the main stage of The

---

<sup>870</sup> Leonard, William. "Local Talent Puts Over 'Big Deal'." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Aug. 16, 1961: 1. ProQuest. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

<sup>871</sup> Barker 98.

<sup>872</sup> Merryfield, Mary. "Are we Getting a New Theater for a New Age?" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Feb. 18, 1962: 1. ProQuest. Web. 26 Dec. 2017; Leonard, William. "It's Time Chicago Said Good Word for Second City." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Mar. 27, 1966: 2. ProQuest. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

<sup>873</sup> Barker 109.

<sup>874</sup> Leonard, "It's Time Chicago Said Good Word for Second City."

Second City. The first plays – *The Explainers* and *Big Deal*, were early attempts by Sills to utilize improvisation as a means and method to develop longer, more narrative work. There was never a dedicated ensemble - many of those who appeared in shows at Playwrights also worked in the revues at The Second City, nor was there ever a planned season. Playwrights at Second City existed because of Sills' interest, and disappeared without it.

Sills continued to try to innovate with form at Second City: in 1962, he staged *My Friend Art Is Dead*, a "scenario play" developed commedia-style, with actors improvising based on a script outline and playing a single character throughout – as the new main stage review at Second City. Sheldon Patinkin remembered it as being "the most heavy-handed bullshit imaginable."<sup>875</sup> The experiment with form was never repeated. Much of Sills' dissatisfaction with Second City lay in the fact that he did not like the writing process. Second City revues are developed by the cast through improvisation and then scripted; until material is generated, there is nothing to direct. Between leading initial improvisation games and directing a final product lay a great deal of frustration for Sills.<sup>876</sup> During 1961 and 1962, The Second City was expanding rapidly, sending revues to New York and London. As the group became more successful, Sills' dissatisfaction increased. In the Spring of 1962, it was announced that he would direct a three-play summer season of Shakespeare at Ravinia under the auspices of Second City.<sup>877</sup> This never came to pass; the following month it was announced that the season was cancelled, ostensibly due to several actors being unavailable for the project.<sup>878</sup> In 1963, he

---

<sup>875</sup> Barker 111-2.

<sup>876</sup> Coleman 290.

<sup>877</sup> Cassidy, Claudia. "On the Aisle." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Apr. 8, 1962: 2. ProQuest. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

<sup>878</sup> Cassidy, Claudia. "On the Aisle." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 25, 1962: 1. ProQuest. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

walked out on a rehearsal and immediately moved to New York.”<sup>879</sup> He spent the next two years working with the Second City revue in New York, as well as collaborating with poet and librettist Arnold Weinstein on an anti-war comic opera, titled *Dynamite Tonight*, which opened and closed in March 1964.<sup>880</sup> The show was revised and revived in 1967 where it had a brief Off-Broadway run. Weinstein and Sills would continue to work on projects for the next decade, most significantly on a piece about the American Revolution, which first appeared in 1968 and went through numerous iterations, eventually culminating in *Sweet Bloody Liberty*, a musical revue which played at Victory Gardens in 1975.<sup>881</sup>

Sills severed ties with The Second City in 1964, selling his share to Patinkin, but continued to direct revues for the company throughout the 1960s.<sup>882</sup> His next venture, Game Theatre, began as a workshop in New York; the initial idea was to present Spolin’s theatre games as entertainment.<sup>883</sup> Upon his return to Chicago in January 1965, Sills opened the Game Theater, in a former bar at 1935 N. Sedgwick. Rather than presenting a performance, customers were invited to participate in theatre games led by Sills and Spolin.<sup>884</sup> Game Theatre was perhaps most accurately characterized by the *Tribune* as “the ‘Do-it-yourself’ night club.”<sup>885</sup> Sills had some difficulty getting audiences to participate, and often relied on a group of enthusiastic amateurs and Second City people, to make the idea work.<sup>886</sup> In retrospect, it

---

<sup>879</sup> Barker 115.

<sup>880</sup> "Theater Notes." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Jan. 5, 1964: 1. ProQuest. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

<sup>881</sup> Barker 126, 146.

<sup>882</sup> Coleman 290.

<sup>883</sup> Barker 116.

<sup>884</sup> Leonard, William. "On the Town." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Jan. 31, 1965: 1. ProQuest. Web. 26 Dec. 2017

<sup>885</sup> Leonard, William. "On the Town." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Feb. 21, 1965: 1. ProQuest. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

<sup>886</sup> Barker 120.

appears that Game Theatre may have operated more along the lines of an informal improv class, with classes meeting during the week and Saturdays serving as something of a showcase for the more gifted or willing students. Game Theatre is significant to Off-Loop Theatre history for its role in consciously engaging and creating a community, as well as for the role it played in helping to evolve Sills' thinking on the subject. At a TDR Theatre Conference in 1965, Sills stated:

This is a country of two hundred million people and besides the Free Southern Theatre and a few experimental groups like Chaikin's there is no theatre in this country that reflects the life of the people. The job of theatre artists is to unite the community with the celebrations of its life. I keep saying that, I have said it for years. But I only begin to understand what it means. How do you do such a thing? (. . .) The theatre in itself is absolutely meaningless. Theatre in the community is meaningful.<sup>887</sup>

Sills' concern with community and the role of theatre and performance in society had been evident since the early 1960s. In a 1962 *Tribune* interview Sills stated, "The community doesn't really exist today. We just pretend it does. We need a new kind of theater. Perhaps improvisation theater. It would summarize what a lot of people are thinking. This is important for a community."<sup>888</sup> By 1964, Sills had further refined his thinking on community and the possibilities of improvisation:

---

<sup>887</sup> Schechner, Richard. "'The New Establishment'? Fragments of the TDR Theatre Conference." *The Tulane Drama Review* 10.4 (1966): 109–129. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 May 2018. 128

<sup>888</sup> Merryfield, "Are We Getting a New Theater for a New Age?"



For us, it would be to take whatever there is of us that is still capable of freedom and move into some sort of free relationship with each other. Your whole job is to actually build some form of community life, either with your wife or your child. That's something. Once you get that going, you've got to go out and get a few other people whom you can work with and share a life with in some form. I say that people should form these theatre groups – game playing, improvising, making up their own pageants – any sort of get-together where they push theatre into existences, drag the living out of whatever community they're in.<sup>889</sup>

When Sills returned to Chicago in 1965, he moved to the Lincoln Park neighborhood, and became heavily involved in the life of his own community. At this time, he became acquainted with Rev. Jim Shiflett, a Presbyterian minister with a shared interest in improvisation and social and political activism.<sup>890</sup> Shiflett first encountered Spolin's theatre games in 1964, after taking his family to a children's workshop at Second City.<sup>891</sup> At the time, he was questioning his own ministry and “. . . was drawn to the sense of community and ensemble he felt from playing Sills and Spolin's theatre games.”<sup>892</sup> He soon resigned from his position as pastor and began to work on a “community ministry through the arts,” which culminated in him becoming the first director of the Community Arts Foundation (CAF) at its founding in March 1966.<sup>893</sup> Based at the Wellington Avenue Congregational Church, CAF was “.

---

<sup>889</sup> Sills, Paul, and Charles L. Mee. “The Celebratory Occasion.” *The Tulane Drama Review* 9.2 (1964): 167–181. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 May 2017. 171.

<sup>890</sup> McCabe, Terry. “Onstage at the Creation: The Role of Clergy in the Early Off-Loop Theatre Movement.” *New England Theatre Journal* 23 (2012): 133-146. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017. 137.

<sup>891</sup> Gray 117.

<sup>892</sup> Gray 118.

<sup>893</sup> Gray 119.

. . an ecumenical experiment involving church, community, and the arts.”<sup>894</sup> Shiflett would become an early leader of the Off-Loop theatre scene, and the founding of CAF would become the spark that created the scene itself. While Shiflett often gets most of the credit for establishing Off-Loop theatre, Sills was the person who both inspired and motivated him to do so. Sills’ views on the use of theatre games and performance in fostering community brought the men together in the first place, and Sills would subsequently influence Shiflett’s work with CAF, culminating in the purchase of a building on Lincoln Avenue to house CAF’s operations as well as Sills’ new theatre company in 1969.<sup>895</sup> Together, Sills and Shiflett created the space that allowed the Off-Loop Theatre scene to come into being: Body Politic. As was typical of Sills, he left the scene just as it became successful.

Sills had not entirely severed ties with Second City: he directed Second City revues in 1966 and 1967. He also returned to directing scripted theatre, holding an acting workshop at Game Theatre that used theatre games in conjunction with Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard*.<sup>896</sup> In September 1966, the *Tribune* announced the creation of “The Second City Center for the Public Arts,” which was to include The Second City, Grant Park Concerts, Aardvark Cinema, Game Theatre and other arts organizations into one entity. Sills and Sheldon Patinkin were to be artistic directors, and The Second City was to be the administrative center. The plans also included the establishment of a theatre school and repertory company.<sup>897</sup> The fact that Sills seems to be central to the project and CAF had tangential involvement suggest that the Second

---

<sup>894</sup> "Kites, Bikes to Aid '4th' Observance in Lincoln Park." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* June 18, 1967: 1. ProQuest. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

<sup>895</sup> Gray 122.

<sup>896</sup> Barker 124-5.

<sup>897</sup> "Organize Second City Center for Public Arts." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Sept. 23, 1966: 1. ProQuest. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

City effort may have served as a trial run for what Shiflett's Community Arts Foundation would set out to do on Lincoln Avenue in 1969, that is, to become an arts-based community center.<sup>898</sup>

The Second City's original building was slated for demolition in an urban renewal plan, and when the group moved to the Piper's Alley development in Old Town in August of 1967, the *Tribune* referred to it as "The Second City Center for the Public Arts." The repertory theatre idea was also alive: "It does not look as if there will be room on Wells street for Second City's legitimate theater program. As plans stand, that will be housed in the Harper theater on the south side, beginning some time this fall."<sup>899</sup> In October it was announced that "Second City Repertory" would present an eight-play series at the Harper Theater, located in the Hyde Park neighborhood. The first three plays announced were Norman Mailer's *The Deer Park*, Sills' collaborator Arnold Weinstein's *The Party*, and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. The company consisted of "professional actors formerly with the Second City Center for the Public Arts."<sup>900</sup> The venture was a partnership between Sills and Second City producers Bernard Sahlins and Sheldon Patinkin, and sponsored by a neighborhood community organization. The group was originally to be called "Playwrights," but this was later dropped.<sup>901</sup> Sills insisted on playing the lead role in Mailer's *The Deer Park*, and also insisted that there be no director for the play. Since he rarely acted, his reasons for wishing to do this were unclear and the results were unfortunate: the reviews for *The Deer Park* were bad. The second show, *The Cherry Orchard*,

---

<sup>898</sup> The article notes that Game Theatre had been awarded a \$34,000 grant from CAF to study the use of theatre games in education.

<sup>899</sup> Leonard, William. "Second City Opens its New Theater Wednesday." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* July 30, 1967: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

<sup>900</sup> "Harper Theater Plays Scheduled." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 5, 1967: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

<sup>901</sup> This was likely a marketing decision: The Second City was successful, while Playwrights was largely forgotten.

grew out of the workshop started at the Game Theatre in 1966, and did not attract an audience.<sup>902</sup> There was no third show.<sup>903</sup> Barker states, "Sills attributed its failure, in general, to the fact that the theatre 'just happened' as opposed to being developed from a 'true idea.'"<sup>904</sup> One can extrapolate that, perhaps to Sills' mind, the Harper theatre venture lacked a connection to its community: it was located in Hyde Park simply because the theatre was available.<sup>905</sup> Sills' work since the original Playwrights had moved towards increasing experimentation based in improvisation: the work on stage at Second City Rep seemed to represent where Sills was at a decade earlier.

The Game Theatre had closed in the summer of 1967.<sup>906</sup> In the Spring of 1968, Sills was no longer affiliated with any theatre company when he received a call from the landlord who owned the former Second City space on Wells St. He was offered the use of the building for the six months remaining until its scheduled demolition. He gathered an ensemble together that included Tom Erhart, Joe Bell, Joyce Piven, Warren Leming, Bernie Beck, Eugenie Ross, Peter Gorwin, Cordes Fejer, and Jeffrey Court. With this group, he developed Story Theatre, which brought together narrative techniques from sources such as Robert Breen's chamber theatre, his own work on Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and the Compass Player's Living Newspaper scenes.<sup>907</sup> Using stories from the Brothers Grimm tales, actors both narrated and performed their characters. To this, Sills added choreography and contemporary music.<sup>908</sup> The stories

---

<sup>902</sup> Barker 127-8.

<sup>903</sup> Feldman, "Brief History of Improvisational Theatre in the United States" 134.

<sup>904</sup> Barker 128.

<sup>905</sup> Hyde Park is on the South side of the city. The Second City was in Old Town on the North side.

<sup>906</sup> Barker 129.

<sup>907</sup> Barker 131.

<sup>908</sup> Lewis, Allan. "Review: *Story Theatre, The Revenger's Tragedy*." *Educational Theatre Journal* 23.1 (1971): 83-84. JSTOR. Web. 26 Dec. 2017. 83.

were developed through improvisation, but eventually set. "The improvisational aspect lay in the training of the company and the spirit of play with which the actors related to one another, the audience, and the space during performance."<sup>909</sup> Barker notes that it brought together several of Sills' interests and passions at the time: to provide good theatre for his own children, as well as to create and engage with the community through theatre. Sills saw Story Theatre as "something for the entire audience, including children – not an esoteric or coterie thing."<sup>910</sup>

The old Second City space was renamed simply "The Theater" and opened July 2, 1968, just in time for the Democratic Convention.<sup>911</sup> The work Sills presented was not overtly political, but in the highly-charged atmosphere of Lincoln Park during the Convention, it came to be seen that way. Sills' new theater came to play a role in the convention itself:

It was directly across the street from Lincoln Park where the convention was to be held.<sup>912</sup> (...) There was no charge for admission, a donation was taken at the end of each performance. When convention week started and the police chased demonstrators out of the park, many of them slept on our benches after the show. Like the churches of the Lincoln Park neighborhood, our theatre was somehow a sanctuary, off limits to the police, who would chase people to our gate but not enter. When our youthful audience saw *The Blue Light* during convention week, in which the old soldier finally defeated the king and all authority, they were so highly charged they shouted "Right on!" I knew we had

---

<sup>909</sup> Barker 134.

<sup>910</sup> Barker 132.

<sup>911</sup> "Sills Plans New Theater in Old Town." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* June 23, 1968: 1. ProQuest. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

<sup>912</sup> This is a misstatement: the convention took place downtown. The Yippies' "Festival of Life" occurred in Lincoln Park.

found a form of theater which contains a teaching that surfaces when the time is right for it.”<sup>913</sup>

Following the convention, Sills was asked to teach theatre games at the Yale University School of Drama. While there, he was then given the opportunity to direct a cabaret production when another show was cancelled, and he produced another *Story Theatre* program to great acclaim.<sup>914</sup> This led to the offer of a permanent position as director of a new cabaret theatre at Yale. Sills declined the job, and wrote a letter to the Dean, Robert Brustein, explaining his reasons, which was subsequently published in *Yale/theatre*.<sup>915</sup> In his letter, several threads in Sills’ career seem to finally tie together; the relationship between theatre and community, and the significance of Chicago in this formation. Still clearly energized from the 1968 convention, Sills describes his next project in Chicago as “The American Political Theater.” It was to be staged like a courtroom, with the Democratic party on trial.<sup>916</sup>

It is in the name of the actual that I stay on here in Chicago and move into the political . . . Not that Yale and your group isn’t actual, but that I have hung out here too long to leave, too many ties and contact points; it would be too great a betrayal of those who know as I that the Chicago spirit has something to offer in

---

<sup>913</sup> Sills, Paul. "Telling Stories." *Theater* Sept. 1998: 61. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017. 61.

<sup>914</sup> Lewis, "Review: *Story Theater, The Revenger's Tragedy*."

<sup>915</sup> The date of the journal is "Summer 1968," which creates an inconsistency. In the introduction to the letter, it states "Earlier this year, Paul Sills, founder of Second City and Game Theatre, was invited to become director of the new cabaret ..." placing the event prior to the opening of the original Story Theatre in Chicago in July 1968. All other sources indicate that Sills first foray into Story Theatre occurred in Chicago, and he was subsequently offered the position at Yale following this. I believe the journal date simply reflects a long lag time in publication: Sills letter most likely dates to the spring of 1969. However, to add to the confusion, a post-script notes that "In a second letter, on April 17, 1968, Mr. Sills wrote us as follows..." No date is referenced for the initial letter. My best guess is that this is an error, and both letters date to 1969. All other sources, including subsequent issues of *Yale/theatre* indicate that Sills was in residence at Yale after August 1968.

<sup>916</sup> Sills, Paul. "Letter from Chicago." *Yale/theatre* 1.2 (Summer 1968): 51-52. *EBSCOhost*, 26 Dec. 2017. 52.

the formation of the American people, and dimly comprehend as I see more clearly that art, and specifically theater, when it has form, has being, is effective, touches, turns us around, actually approaches us and demands we take our stand.<sup>917</sup>

The sentiment underlying Sills' "letter" is unconsciously echoed in the statements made by Jeff Perry, then artistic director of Steppenwolf Theatre, when announcing the company's decision to remain based in Chicago in 1984.<sup>918</sup> In 1969, Sills saw Chicago as the only place in which he could continue his work, largely for personal and political reasons, and despite the fact that the city's theatre scene appeared nearly non-existent. Fifteen years later, Steppenwolf opted to remain in Chicago for artistic and economic reasons, yet both statements indicate a disposition to view the city as an artistic home.

Sills' letter closes with a summary of his career to date:

The Compass and Second City, for all their trust of theatrical truth, were too soon at the service of the bitch-goddess Success. The Game Theater is prophetic of community, but it has much to say to the classroom situation. The American Political Theater is more than agit-prop or opinion, or surpasses the Brechtian dialectic (which is its test), and becomes art insofar as it becomes town forum, place of meeting; it holds truth to be self-evident. Frankly I haven't the faintest idea of what it will become. . . Who knows what it could be? It is open. . .<sup>919</sup>

---

<sup>917</sup> Sills, "Letter from Chicago."

<sup>918</sup> Christiansen, Richard. "Success Won't Break Up the Gang, Steppenwolf Says." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* July 3, 1984: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 May 2018.

<sup>919</sup> Sills, "Letter from Chicago."

Sills is referring to his own theatre project, but could just as easily be referring to the Off-Loop theatre “explosion,” to borrow Gray’s term, that was about to unfold. When Sills returned to Chicago, he, along with William Russo of the Free Theatre and pub owner Bruce Oxford, approached Jim Shiflett with a plan to have the Community Arts Foundation purchase a building on Lincoln Ave. to serve as a community arts center, with rental income from Oxford’s pub covering the mortgage. The building at 2257–63 N. Lincoln had formerly housed the U.S. Slicing Machine Company and the Monte Carlo Bowling Alley.<sup>920</sup> Instead of “The American Political Theatre,” Sills’ new company was dubbed “The Body Politic,” and their first show, a Story Theatre version of *Ovid’s Metamorphosis* opened in October 1969.<sup>921</sup> It was followed by *The Master Thief and Other Stories* and *The Parson in the Cupboard*.<sup>922</sup>

Sills’ Story Theatre/Body Politic was one of the first successes of the Off-Loop theatre scene; in October 1969, the *Tribune* covered the new experimental theatre scene, focusing on Sills’ group, June Pyskacek’s Kingston Mines and a third effort called “The Los Angeles Coliseum” that did not survive. Sills asserted at the time:

“There will never be a theatrical renaissance in Chicago,” he declared.

“Chicagoans are meatheads. I should know, I’m a Chicagoan. Chicagoans are not New Yorkers, and they’re not going to turn into New Yorkers. And I’m going to stay right here, try to do something creative, and see if they’ll get interested in it.”<sup>923</sup>

---

<sup>920</sup> Gray 122.

<sup>921</sup> Leonard, “3 New Theaters Display Wares.”

<sup>922</sup> Barker 140.

<sup>923</sup> Leonard, “3 New Theaters Display Wares.”



However, true to form, Sills did not stick around: the Story Theatre performances at The Body Politic closed in June 1970. Sills received an offer to bring the show to Los Angeles; he assembled a new company of actors, and from this point on, his fortunes lay beyond Chicago. In the 1970s, *Story Theatre* productions had successful runs in Los Angeles, New York, Washington, DC, and Miami as well as a national tour and a Canadian TV series. Sills returned to Chicago to produce shows in 1972 and 1975, but never made the city his home again.<sup>924</sup> He had once again started something and then walked away. The name “Body Politic” was soon adopted by the Community Arts Foundation as the name for the facility on Lincoln Ave.

Perhaps more than anyone else, Paul Sills contributed to the habitus of Off-Loop theatre by fostering and promoting ensemble, and in his creation of the Body Politic space, which became an incubator for other young theatre companies. Playwrights Theatre Club serves as the template for Off-Loop theatre companies in that it closely adheres to what would become the Steppenwolf Scenario: it was formed by a group of college friends, operated as an ensemble, converted a commercial space into a theatre, and strove to distinguish themselves as professional actors - to turn Equity. They also were one of the first contemporary theatre companies to face extinction in the face of a visit from a City Building inspector.

Ensemble is perhaps Sills’ most important contribution to the habitus of Off-Loop theatre: he was deeply rooted in improvisation, a form which depends upon developing a sense of trust and interdependence with your fellow players. He began this ensemble-focused work while still a college student, and it would eventually take form at Second City and with Story Theatre. The Playwrights Theatre Club developed a group identity out of isolation; Gray

---

<sup>924</sup> Barker 140-3.

attributes Playwright's sense of ensemble as coming from a sense of rebellion against the conformity of the 1950s. "There is something about the "us" of an ensemble that makes its members feel funnier, smarter or more talented than the "them" of society at large." He suggests that ensembles form as a way for like-minded people to band together to face a seemingly hostile world.<sup>925</sup>

This quality of the Playwrights Theatre ensemble drew comparisons to the Steppenwolf ensemble, from someone with firsthand knowledge of both groups: Sheldon Patinkin, who directed at Steppenwolf:

Steppenwolf is, without question, and I don't mean this to sound in anyway patronizing, the closest to us of any group I've encountered in all the years since we (Playwrights Theatre Club) started back in '53. In terms of how they got together. The fluke of all of those very talented people being in the same place at the same time. The fluke was greater with us, because we were at a college that doesn't have a theatre department and only has extracurricular theatre activities, so it was even weirder . . . The dedication was similar. We did live together. Many of us literally did live together at Playwrights because a lot of us slept in the theatre in the little alcoves that we put cots in.<sup>926</sup>

Secondly, Sills created The Second City, which came to national prominence a decade prior to Off-Loop Theatre: Second City helped to put Chicago on the map as a place to begin a career in comedy; and this cachet soon transferred over to Off-Loop Theatre. The improvisational

---

<sup>925</sup> Gray 70-1.

<sup>926</sup> Mayer, John. *The Steppenwolf Theatre Company of Chicago, 1974 – 1982*. Diss. U Missouri-Columbia, 1993. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1993. Print. 50.

technique created by Viola Spolin and developed and promoted by Paul Sills places great emphasis on ensemble, which further helped anchor a favorable disposition towards ensemble theatre in Chicago.

Sills' emphasis on community, through his work with Game Theatre and his activities during the late 1960s, helped anchor a disposition within Chicago's arts community to view itself *as* a community, almost from its inception, as we shall see in subsequent chapters. His role in founding and establishing The Body Politic Space cannot be underestimated – although it may have served a selfish purpose at the time in that his company needed a place to perform, numerous other groups benefitted from the creation of a small, inexpensive theatre space intended to serve as an incubator for arts groups. Also, Sills' Story Theatre was, after Second City, one of the first big successes to come out of Chicago's theatre scene, and so it helped to put Chicago forward as a city that generates theatre within the national field. In all of these ways, Sills directly created or contributed to the “. . . durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” which constitute the habitus of Off-Loop theatre.<sup>927</sup>

The shift that occurred that created Off-Loop theatre was something of a conceptual one, and it can be said to have occurred within Paul Sills' psyche: Sills (and the Chicago community), went from thinking of Chicago's theatre as imitative or derivative of New York Theatre, to creating our own theatre; out of ourselves, based in ideas of ensemble and community. Playwrights Theatre Club was an imitation of Off-Broadway, while in his work with

---

<sup>201</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre and Randal Johnson. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia UP, 1993. Print. 5.

Compass, Second City, Game Theatre, and Story Theatre he evolved a new, generative form in which the community essentially tells its own story for its own benefit. In Sills' work, we see a truly original and revolutionary approach which combines authorship and performance into one process. While Sickinger showed the Chicago community that the city could indeed produce high-quality theatre, Sills' work showed the community that it could do so on its own terms, in its own language. In that respect, a truly original Chicago style of theatre began with Sills.

### **June Pyskacek**

The dominant narrative of Chicago's theatre in the 1960s - the pre-history of the Off-Loop theatre movement – often reads as if it is the story of one man changing (or creating a system): Bob Sickinger coming to town and creating Hull-House Theatre, or Paul Sills creating a new ensemble or inventing a new theatrical form. Despite the preponderance of male-centered narratives in this era, an important counternarrative exists; that of a woman creating an alternative to a male-dominated field. June Pyskacek founded Kingston Mines theatre in 1969, and in doing so, reactivated an important disposition of the habitus of Off-Loop theatre that Alice Gerstenberg had started in the 1910s: the disposition to found one's own theatre company when dissatisfied with the status quo. Pyskacek is also significant in that she serves as the most overt and direct link between Off-Loop and the Off-Off-Broadway movement.

Pyskacek had been directing avant-garde theatre in Chicago since the mid-1960s, and Kingston Mines was the result of her being disregarded and discounted in the creation of the other pillar of the early Off-Loop theatre scene: Body Politic. Besides founding Kingston Mines, Pyskacek was also a founder of Victory Gardens in 1974, and established two other theatres – Fox Trails Theatre and Chicago Theatre Strategy - in the 1970s. She also taught at Columbia

College and other area colleges, had a long-standing working relationship with playwright Megan Terry, and continued to direct Off-Loop theatre productions into the mid-1990s.<sup>928</sup> Despite her long and varied career, Pyskacek's contributions often seem to be overlooked; unlike her contemporaries Sickinger, Sills, and Rev. Jim Shiflett, she seemed to prefer that her work be the focus of public attention.

According to a 1975 *Tribune* profile, Pyskacek grew up in the suburb of Cicero wanting to be an actress.<sup>929</sup> She attended University of Illinois and returned to Chicago in the early 1950s. She then went to New York and studied at the Herbert Berghoff studio, before returning to Chicago. She seems to have had some involvement with Bernard Sahlins' Studebaker theatre season in 1956-57, before obtaining her masters at the Goodman School of Drama in 1960.<sup>930</sup> "It was going back to Goodman that got me interested in directing. I started to see theater in a different way. I knew all of the traditional stuff – Shakespeare, Miller – had been done by different people, and could be done better; so I started looking for new plays."<sup>931</sup> Her quest for new plays led her to the American avant-garde. In a later interview, she expanded on this idea:

I subscribed to all these little poetry magazines and I was reading all these strange verse plays and wonderful stuff. I liked the absurdists in Europe. I was

---

<sup>928</sup> Christiansen, Richard. "Intense Acting, Bates Script Give Production of 'The Island' its Power." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Apr. 9, 1992: 24. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017; Langer, Adam. "The Bay at Nice." *Chicago Reader* Jan. 26, 1995: N. Pag. [www.chicagoreader.com](http://www.chicagoreader.com). Web. 27 Dec 2017.

<sup>929</sup> Colander, Pat. "People: From the 'Circus' to the High-wire World of Theater." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Dec. 12, 1975: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.

<sup>930</sup> The *Tribune* article states that she spent a year with Sills (which is unlikely) while he tried to build the company at the Studebaker (which is inaccurate). Sills' involvement at the Studebaker was limited to directing a single show, *Lysistrata* in 1957. Compass Theatre had ended at this point, and Second City had not yet been established. *Lysistrata* seems to have an interim project for Sills; following the production, he went to New York City for an extended period. Pyskacek may have worked for or volunteered with the Studebaker in some capacity during their single season, and met Sills in the course of that year.

<sup>931</sup> Colander, "People: From the 'Circus' to the High-wire..."

just trying to find something that spoke to what I thought was “my generation” and of course it happened in New York, in the ‘60s, with the Open Theater, and then all the people involved with the Open Theater.<sup>932</sup>

Her personal life intervened early in her career; she had married and had children while in graduate school; upon graduation her husband was recalled into military service. Pyskacek and the children followed him to Ft. Bliss in El Paso, and it was there, at the Ft. Bliss Community Playhouse, that she directed her first two plays. In 1964, her marriage ended and Pyskacek moved to New York with her children, hoping to get involved in the Off-Off-Broadway movement, “I wanted to work at Judson Playhouse in the Village: it was supposed to be exciting there. I walked in and said that I would do anything. I’d sweep the floors. Well, I didn’t even get past the secretary. She said they had enough floor-sweepers already. I spent a whole year working odd jobs to keep us alive. It was terrible.”<sup>933</sup>

She returned to Chicago in the mid-1960s, and found the beginnings of an alternative art and theater scene beginning to stir. She soon made a niche for herself directing “happenings;” the sixties-era iteration of performance art. As Pyskacek describes them, “Happenings were free, not rehearsed, a series of events that were structured slightly to create a take on our culture.”<sup>934</sup> An outgrowth of the visual art scene of the time, Pyskacek brought a theatrical sensibility to happenings, and was credited with imposing enough structure on the event to make it coherent to viewers. She directed a happening that took place at the Old Town

---

<sup>932</sup> Sills 71.

<sup>933</sup> Colander, “People: From the 'Circus' to the High-wire...”

<sup>934</sup> Sills 71.

Players theatre in 1965 which brought her to the attention of Byron Hildreth and George Ralph, the directors of the St. James Players, soon to become the Chicago City Players.<sup>935</sup>

The St. James Players were a church-based community theatre, founded by Hildreth and Ralph in 1962 and housed at a Congregationalist church in Old Town.<sup>936</sup> In 1965, the group became an outreach program of the Chicago City Missionary Society, a protestant ecumenical organization with an interest in community renewal and social justice. The Off-Loop theatre movement is an outgrowth of the work of ecumenical protestant religious organizations, such as the Chicago City Missionary Society (CCMS) and the similar North Side Cooperative Ministry (NSCM) throughout the 1960s.

This activity was the most consequential part of a broader phenomenon, a revival among church groups during the mid-twentieth century of interest in the nineteenth-century doctrine of the social gospel, a liberal theological movement that understood the point of Christian ethics to be to work toward the solving of social problems. In Chicago and elsewhere, even non-politically active pastors breathing the air of the social gospel sought to involve their churches more directly in the lives of their communities. This led locally to a number of churches providing space in their buildings to arts groups, including theaters.<sup>937</sup>

The churches were attempting to remain relevant in a time of great social upheaval, to connect with their changing urban neighborhoods, and particularly in the case of Lincoln Park, to become a force for healing in a neighborhood torn asunder by a controversial urban renewal

---

<sup>935</sup> Sills 72.

<sup>936</sup> Sills 67.

<sup>937</sup> McCabe 134.

program.<sup>938</sup> The CCMS and NSCM viewed the arts and theatre as “forces for renewal” in the community, and both “involved themselves in the urban renewal of Lincoln Park and the start of the Lincoln Avenue theatre scene.”<sup>939</sup>

1965 stands as a pivotal year when it comes to laying the groundwork for the Off-Loop theatre scene. In that year, Pyskacek was hired to be an associate director for the St. James Players, which soon became the Chicago City Players. The Players had been funded by the CCMS since their founding in 1962; although they were never intended to be a strictly “religious” theatre company, a disagreement arose in 1965 between the pastor of St. James and the theatre company over their choice of material.<sup>940</sup> Rev. James Kidd of Wellington Avenue Congregational Church was a board member of the Players and invited them to move to his church and use Baird Hall as a theatre; “Kidd had a broader view of the arts than was practiced at St. James, and his great contribution was simply that he rented the Chicago City Players a theatre and office space for a dollar a year and gave them total artistic freedom to do whatever plays they wanted to do.”<sup>941</sup> With the move, the name of the group was changed to the Chicago City Players. At this time, George Ralph left to accept an academic job; Byron Hildreth became the artistic director, and Pyskacek was made associate director.<sup>942</sup>

Also in 1965, Rev. Jim Shiflett was first hired by the CCMS to conduct a study on the need for a community arts center on Chicago’s North side. The results of Shiflett’s study led the CCMS to form the Community Arts Foundation (CAF), for the purpose of facilitating the creation

---

<sup>938</sup> Gleason, Catherine H. *Mapping the Lincoln Park Nexus: The Origin of the Chicago Off-Loop Theatre Movement*. Diss. U of Wisconsin-Madison, 2010. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2011. Print. 6.

<sup>939</sup> Gleason 85.

<sup>940</sup> McCabe 135.

<sup>941</sup> McCabe 136.

<sup>942</sup> Sills 67-8.



of an arts center in the Lincoln Park neighborhood. Shiflett was hired to head the new entity.<sup>943</sup>

The Chicago City Players, which had reported directly to CCMS, were then placed under the umbrella of the CAF, along with some other CCMS-funded arts and community outreach programs. In 1966, Shiflett and the CAF offices also moved in to the Wellington Ave.

Congregational Church complex.<sup>944</sup> The history between the Chicago City Players and the CAF is complicated – the Players existed first, but later came under the purview of Shiflett’s CAF, which went on to found Body Politic in 1969. Gleason notes that the Community Arts Foundation and the Chicago City Players maintained separate identities, although some of their programs appear to have been similar; Chicago City Players was run by Hildreth and Pyskacek, and continued to offer plays and expanded into teen and street theatre. Shiflett headed CAF programing that included visual art, music, theatre, and Sills’ Game Theatre.<sup>945</sup>

In retrospect, Shiflett appears to have been rather single-minded in his mission to establish an arts center, and seems to have had little use for the Chicago City Players. However, in 1968, CCP received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, based largely on June Pyskacek’s work directing Off-Off-Broadway playwrights. Shiflett, in alliance with Paul Sills, wanted to use the money towards a new arts center. The resulting conflict between Shiflett and Pyskacek led to the establishment of both Body Politic and Kingston Mines within a block of each other on Lincoln Ave., thereby creating a new theatre “scene” by the fall of 1969.

The alternative theatre scene that Pyskacek became a part of in 1965 was entirely amateur, and based in social service or religious ideals. Like Sickinger’s Hull-House Theatre

---

<sup>943</sup> Gleason 99.

<sup>944</sup> Gleason 100.

<sup>945</sup> Gleason 101.

program, Chicago City Players saw their artistic mission in terms of social service, as “. . . as restorative, enlightening, and educational by leading audiences to think and reflect, it could create a better society.”<sup>946</sup> Early on, under Ralph and Hildreth, the group tried to focus on plays with religious content or spiritual themes. The first production Pyskacek took part in was an evening of three Mystery plays, with each member of the artistic staff directing a piece.<sup>947</sup> After Ralph’s departure, the play selections came to reflect Pyskacek’s interests. Between 1965 and 1967, the Players produced work by Max Frisch, Anouilh, Ionesco, Beckett, Arrabal, and Jean-Claude Van Itallie.<sup>948</sup> Gleason observes that Pyskacek’s dramaturgy served the Players well by avoiding overtly religious work; “. . . the Chicago City Players were less likely to offend religious leaders by staying out of their bailiwick and, second, they had the advantage of gathering a diverse audience that might have objected to proselytizing plays.”<sup>949</sup> Chicago City Players shifted to focusing on the avant-garde, catering to the same general audience that Hull-House served, although Sills notes that there appears to have been little overlap or communication between the two groups.<sup>950</sup> Their mission, from 1967:

We are interested in providing our audiences with plays in which real theatrical functions are performed: recognition, identification, catharsis, celebration. We are not interested in theater construed as diversion or escape: i.e., what is currently called “entertainment.” We are interested in entertainment if the word

---

<sup>946</sup> Sills 69.

<sup>947</sup> Sills 74.

<sup>948</sup> Sills 73-6.

<sup>949</sup> Gleason 97.

<sup>950</sup> Sills 75.

is understood in its original meaning of leading people into the world and into themselves.<sup>951</sup>

The Players viewed their social service mission as that of providing provocative, challenging theatre for their community, catering to all segments of society, to fight “cultural isolation.” “The process of doing established plays, (selected for content that would ideally challenge and enlighten audience-goers) was seen to be a socially active and rehabilitative action.”<sup>952</sup>

In 1967, Pyskacek met playwright Jean-Claude van Itallie, fostering a connection between the Chicago City Players and the Off-Off-Broadway scene. Van Itallie was working as a scout for a Sunday morning TV series that presented new theater productions and had attended a happening staged by Pyskacek. He was interested in putting the happening on TV, but soon realized that due to its spontaneous and simultaneous nature, it would not work. Van Itallie asked Pyskacek if she had anything else to offer:

And I said, “Actually, yes!” I was doing Ionesco’s *Bedlam Galore For Two Or More*. He said, “Let’s see that.” And he saw a production of it. So they came in and they shot that for the TV show. And he said, “Would you like to see some of my plays?” and I said, “Sure.” And then I did almost all of his early plays.<sup>953</sup>

Van Itallie’s acquaintance gave Pyskacek an entrée to Off-Off-Broadway: she later attended rehearsals at Joe Chaikin’s Open Theatre and met playwrights Maria Irene Fornes and Megan Terry. She would direct several plays by Van Itallie, Fornes, and Terry in Chicago, and CCP would present work by other Off-Off-Broadway writers such as Lanford Wilson, Leonard Melfi, and

---

<sup>951</sup> Sills 69.

<sup>952</sup> Sills 70.

<sup>953</sup> Sills 73.

Sam Shepherd.<sup>954</sup> In 1968, she stated: "I live to do avant-garde American plays (...) They're very much of our own experience. The playwrights are young and serious. They've had a lot of attention since their first works were published."<sup>955</sup> Pyskacek had established herself as Chicago's avant-garde theatre director and gained the attention of the new National Endowment for the Arts.

Chicago City Players predated the creation of the Community Arts Foundation, and under Shiflett's leadership it seems to have been treated as a poor cousin. As head of the CAF, the CCP answered to Shiflett, although he seems to have had little interest in their work. Gleason, who has done extensive research into the archives of the Community Arts Foundation and Body Politic, notes that she found thirteen different "histories" of Body Politic - most written as part of grant proposals - which often mention outreach and educational programs that were run by Chicago City Players, but omit any mention of CCP itself.<sup>956</sup> Gleason comments on Shiflett's opportunism with regards to funding his proposed art center:

Depending on the date and purpose of the document, the project changed to fit the situation at hand. One proposal advocated for a "New City University" in the southwestern sector of the Lincoln Park neighborhood and another suggested converting an entire block into artists' housing, studios and gallery space. The necessity of an arts center with a theatre venue persisted throughout all of these documents reflecting a consistent vision of one part of each of these proposals,

---

<sup>954</sup> Gleason 103; Sills 80; "Other 89 - No Title." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Jan. 21, 1968: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017; "Other 32 - No Title." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Nov. 1, 1968: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.

<sup>955</sup> Quinn, James. "Avant-Garde Themes Draw Theater Crowds." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Feb. 4, 1968: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.

<sup>956</sup> Gleason 99 – 102.

even when the purpose changed to match the opportunity at hand. Therefore, it appears Shiflett pursued a personal goal to make this arts center happen, regardless of what other community and religious needs might have to be met in order to get the project moving forward.”<sup>957</sup>

This came to a breaking point in 1968: Chicago City Players received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, based on Pyskacek’s presentation of new playwrights. The grant was paid to the CAF, rather than directly to Pyskacek or CCP, and so Shiflett had a say in how it was spent, and wanted the funds to go towards the new arts center – a project that CCP was never involved in. Pyskacek met with Shiflett, Sills, and Hildreth to discuss the matter, and it did not end well: Gleason states that “Hildreth refused to back her up, Shiflett was not willing to change his mind about the appropriation of the money, and Sills accused her of being selfish and left in a huff.”<sup>958</sup> Shiflett prevailed: as director of the CAF, he ultimately had control over the grant money, and it was used towards the purchase of the building on Lincoln Avenue, which became Body Politic.

As the CAF moved operations to the Body Politic space, CCP dissolved. Pyskacek left the group: *America Hurrah* by Van Itallie, which ran from January through March 1969, was her final show.<sup>959</sup> Sills notes that the board of the Community Arts Foundation split, with half continuing at Wellington Avenue Church as the “New Chicago City Players,” which was short lived and included no one from the original company, and the rest moving to the new arts

---

<sup>957</sup> Gleason 99.

<sup>958</sup> Sills 76.

<sup>959</sup> “Other 22 - No Title.” *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current File)* Jan. 24, 1969: 1. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec 2017; “Theater notes.” *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current File)* Mar. 30, 1969: 1. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec 2017.

center on Lincoln Ave.<sup>960</sup> Rather than simply quit, Pyskacek did something that would come to characterize Off-Loop theatre: she founded her own company. CCP had a loose ensemble, “. . . made up of actors with past experience at Hull House, Northwestern University, University of Chicago, and various Chicago theaters.”<sup>961</sup> Many of these members – such as Jim Jacobs, Roberta Custer, Jack Wallace, Larry Hart, and Allan Carlson - followed Pyskacek into her next venture.<sup>962</sup> She obtained rehearsal space at the Ivanhoe theatre and began rehearsing another play by Van Itallie, *The Serpent*, during the summer of 1969.<sup>963</sup> A friend recommended that she look into a space at 2356 N. Lincoln Ave., a former trolley barn. In an interview with Kathleen Sills, Pyskacek recalled:

So I was teaching a class at the University of Illinois in the history of theater. I seem to have gotten paid in one lump at the end, so I took all my money from that and put it down on the first month’s rent, security deposit, and the last month’s rent. They wanted \$1000 a month, which was a lot of money at that time. It was a huge space. I talked them into starting at \$500 a month, and then pro-rated over the years. So we did that. We started the Kingston Mines in the fall of 1969.<sup>964</sup>

---

<sup>960</sup> Sills 81.

<sup>961</sup> Sills 67.

<sup>962</sup> Sills 174.

<sup>963</sup> Sills 81.

<sup>964</sup> Sills 174.

The company was named after the smallest town anyone in the group could think of, Kingston Mines, IL, the birthplace of actor Jack Wallace's grandfather.<sup>965</sup> Their first production, *The Serpent*, opened almost simultaneously with *Body Politic*.<sup>966</sup>

On October 5, 1969, the *Tribune* ran a feature article, "3 New Theaters Display Wares" which profiled the new theaters opening on Lincoln Ave. The article gives no hint of the story behind *Body Politic* and Kingston Mines relationship. In the piece, critic William Leonard characterized *The Serpent* as ". . . a way out survey of men's troubles, done in a seemingly chaotic style reminiscent of Living theater." Pyskacek's direction is praised, as is the interesting space itself:

The cast of 15 does a great deal of squirming, wriggling, crawling, and climbing over one another. It may look like chaos, but it's carefully coordinated, and it builds in suspense, and forcefulness, to a powerful finale, in which the company streams off stage singing, "My little playmate, come out and play with me. . . and we'll be jolly friends forever more."

The Kingston Miners work on a spacious floor in a cavernous room, with the audience seated on benches on all four sides. There's an amazing intimacy, considering the size of the hall. It's an impressive show, and it will be around on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings thru November.<sup>967</sup>

---

<sup>965</sup> Clifford, Terry. "Jack Wallace: Off the Ropes and into the Footlights." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Feb. 6, 1977: 5. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

<sup>966</sup> Gleason 111.

<sup>967</sup> Leonard, "3 New Theaters Display Wares."

The Kingston Mines company produced until 1973, and is now best remembered as the birthplace of the musical *Grease* in 1971, created by company members Warren Casey and Jim Jacobs.<sup>968</sup> The Kingston Mines space remained in use as a theatre for a few more years, before being torn down to build a parking garage.<sup>969</sup>

Chicago did not have a theatre “scene” until Body Politic and Kingston Mines were open within a block of each other. Despite the circumstances that led Pyskacek to start her own theatre, there is little evidence to suggest ongoing animosity or antagonism; Pyskacek later directed shows at Body Politic under Shiflett’s leadership, and Paul Sills included Kingston Mines in his invitation to Stuart Gordon to bring his Organic Theatre to Chicago - that with a third theatre, they will “have a scene.”<sup>970</sup> This speaks to part of the habitus of Off-Loop theatre; the idea of mutual support and collegiality, rather than competition. Despite the rather unethical circumstances that led to the establishment of the two theatres, there appears to have been an almost immediate recognition on the part of all involved that something positive was happening, and that the future of the new theatre companies depended on cooperation and mutual support. This spirit may have been part of the spirit of the era, as both theatres were heavily steeped in a countercultural ethos, but this idea of support, cooperation, and collegiality between artists and organizations has remained a part of the habitus of Off-Loop theatre.

---

<sup>968</sup> Sills 178.

<sup>969</sup> The “Kingston Mines” name lives on as the name of a blues club, which evolved out of a café that shared space with the original theatre company.

<sup>970</sup> Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 162.



Pyskacek's personal life again intervened in her theatre career; she remarried in the early 1970s and moved to the suburbs, leaving Kingston Mines just before *Grease* was about to go into production. Again, she started her own theatre: "But starting over in a new place was never one of June's weak suits. Before you could say "Mike Nichols," she was running a theater in an old ski chalet in Barrington Hills. The little theater did pretty well in the summer, but in the winter it faded. So did her second marriage."<sup>971</sup> Pyskacek returned to the city in the early 1970s. In 1974, she was part of the collective that founded Victory Gardens theatre, but soon left the group to establish her own company, Chicago Theatre Strategy. She also taught at University of Illinois-Chicago, the Goodman, and Columbia College Chicago.

Beyond her role as a director, Pyskacek is significant for fostering a dramaturgical and aesthetic connection between Chicago and the Off-Off-Broadway movement. While it is true that Bob Siskinger often staged recent Off-Broadway successes at Hull-House Theatres, Pyskacek was unique in that she forged direct ties with working playwrights. In 1967, she first met Jean-Claude Van Itallie, which brought her to Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre, and led to her meeting Maria Irene Fornes and Megan Terry. Pyskacek would subsequently produce several plays by Van Itallie, Terry, and Fornes at Chicago City Players. She staged Van Itallie's *America Hurrah* and a double bill of Terry's *Calm Down Mother*, and Fornes' *Successful Life of 3*.<sup>972</sup> In 1972, she invited Fornes to take part in rehearsals for Kingston Mines production of *Promenade*, and remounted *Successful Life of 3* in 1975 with Chicago Theatre Strategy.<sup>973</sup> In

---

<sup>971</sup> Colander, "People: From the 'Circus' to the High-wire World of Theater."

<sup>972</sup> *America Hurrah* Program. Chicago City Players file. Chicago Theatre Archives. Harold Washington Library Special Collections, Chicago, IL. 8 July 2017; "Other 89 -- No Title." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Jan. 21, 1968: 1. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

<sup>973</sup> Leonard, William. "Theater Review: A Madhouse Promenade': To the Rear, Hark!" *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 20, 1972: 1 ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec 2017; Houston, Gary. "Her Plays Create a World Filled with

1977, Chicago Theatre Strategy staged Terry's *Hothouse*, then followed it in 1979 with the world premiere of the "autobiographical sequel" *Attempted Rescue on Avenue B*.<sup>974</sup> Richard Christiansen noted the close relationship between Pyskacek and Terry in the review, describing them as "friends and occasional collaborators since the 1960s."<sup>975</sup>

Pyskacek also produced work by Sam Shepard: Chicago City Players appears to have been the first local company to produce Shepherd's work, staging *Red Cross* and *Fourteen Hundred Thousand* in 1968.<sup>976</sup> It is not known if Pyskacek directed these plays – a publicity photo indicates that she acted in *Red Cross*. She also directed Shepherd's *Operation Sidewinder* for Columbia College in 1970, and staged his *Suicide in B Flat* with Chicago Theatre Strategy in 1978.<sup>977</sup> In a season that featured productions of Shepard's *Angel City* at Body Politic and *Curse of the Starving Class* at the Goodman, Richard Christiansen singled Pyskacek out: "Director June Pyskacek, who has staged other Shepard works here, seems to understand the workings of his imagination...."<sup>978</sup> Although it does not appear that Pyskacek knew Shepard personally, her connections with some of the most important Off-Off-Broadway playwrights helped anchor their work in Chicago, and her willingness to stage the avant-garde helped expand the repertoire of scripted material available to Chicago theatres.

---

Beauty and Wisdom." *Chicago Sun-Times* Oct. 8, 1972: N. pag. Kingston Mines File. Chicago Theatre Archives. Harold Washington Library Special Collections, Chicago. 8 July 2017; "Other 33 -- No Title." *Chicago Tribune* (1963-Current file) Jan. 19, 1975: 3. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec 2017.

<sup>974</sup> Kart, Larry. "Theater: 'Hothouse': Roz rewrites the rules." *Chicago Tribune* (1963-Current file) May 6, 1977: 6. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec 2017.

<sup>975</sup> Christiansen, Richard. "Tempo Theater: 'Rescue on Avenue B' catches mood of Beat '50s." *Chicago Tribune* (1963-Current file) Mar. 20, 1979: 5. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec 2017.

<sup>976</sup> "Other 32 -- No Title." *Chicago Tribune* (1963-Current file) Nov. 1, 1968: 18. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec 2017.

<sup>977</sup> "Curtain Calls." *Chicago Tribune* (1963-Current file) Dec. 17, 1970: 4. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec 2017.

<sup>978</sup> Christiansen, Richard. "Tempo Entertainment: Key 'B Flat' actors not in concert with concept." *Chicago Tribune* (1963-Current file) Sept. 20, 1978: 5. ProQuest. Web. 27 Dec 2017.

Finally, Pyskacek is significant for displaying what her colleague Gary Houston later referred to as a “vital arrogance” - enacting the scenario of “I’ll show you, I’ll start my own company,” which has become a part of habitus of Off-Loop theatre.<sup>979</sup> Rather than give up or engage in a protracted battle with Shiflett over funding, Pyskacek found a third option – starting Kingston Mines and determining her own destiny as an artist. Further, she is significant in that she did this several more times in her career –sometimes simply due to her life circumstances - but by doing so, showed that it was possible to start again in Chicago.

## **Conclusion**

In her dissertation, *Mapping the Lincoln Park Nexus*, Gleason isolates the beginning of the Off-Loop theatre movement to the period of 1968 to 1973. In this period, the dispositions came together in a new way, and a new habitus takes shape. The model for an Off-Loop theatre company was established by Paul Sills and the Playwrights Theatre Club in the 1950s, but seems to have been somewhat ahead of its time as it inspired no real imitators or successors. By the end of the 1960s, the field had been prepared by Sickinger’s Hull-House theatre - which trained actors, directors, writers, and artist, created an audience, set an aesthetic, ingrained a work ethic, and built facilities. June Pyskacek’s Chicago City Players also trained actors and expanded the aesthetic palette of Off-Loop theatre, forging a direct link to Off-Off-Broadway through her connections to the Open Theatre. The seeds were planted by Sills, who fostered innovation, ingrained a sense of ensemble and community, and drew the national spotlight to the city’s theatre scene through his work with Second City and Story Theatre. It is noteworthy that

---

<sup>979</sup> Houston, Gary. “A Vital Arrogance.” *Resetting The Stage: Theater Beyond The Loop, 1960-1990*. Chicago: Chicago Public Library, 1990. 16 – 22. Print. 18.

Sickinger's vision of theatres ". . . in every neighborhood of the city. In old firehouses, old police stations, garages"<sup>980</sup> came into being through Paul Sills, via his association with Jim Shiflett, in a quest to heal a broken neighborhood through the arts: the very mission that Sickinger skirted at Hull-House for five seasons, was fulfilled by Body Politic. The creation of Body Politic led to the destruction of Chicago City Players, but this also resulted in the birth of Pyskacek's Kingston Mines – without which there would have been no "scene" at all.

Habitus can be altered, sometimes in response to catastrophic events. A natural disaster can alter the way of life for a community, just as technical innovation can alter an economy and change a community's way of life. With regards to the Chicago theatre community, the 1968 Democratic Convention served as the habitus-altering cataclysm. It changed the consciousness of the city's theatre community: it may have started with Paul Sills' realization that Chicago was the only place he could do the work he wanted to do, but it soon spread outward. This realization helped spawn new institutions – such as Body Politic – which fostered new arts groups, and alternatives to the alternative emerged immediately with Kingston Mines. The dispositions towards ensemble, inclusivity, and community-mindedness that had long been present in the theatre community came to the fore and fit well with the countercultural ethos of the times.

The motivations had shifted within the theatre community; Sickinger's Hull-House theatre was an imitation of Off-Broadway, while Pyskacek's Chicago Community Players was an imitation of Off-Off-Broadway; but the 1968 Convention galvanized a countercultural community to create its own type of theatre, which in turn created its own institutions such as

---

<sup>980</sup> Jacobi, "Culture, Does Anyone Really Care?" 70.

Body Politic and Kingston Mines, and its own kind of theatre, such as improv and Story Theatre. Within a few years, the “radical” aspect of early Off-Loop theatre faded, and we see a return to a focus on realism, exemplified by David Mamet’s work, and the productions of St. Nicholas and later Steppenwolf Theatre. The Off-Loop theatre of the mid-1970s came to be more in line aesthetically with what Sickinger was doing in the 1960s. At the same time, the ground on which these new Off-Loop theatres, many founded in 1974, stood owed its existence to the radical activism of the 1960s, represented by Sills, Shiflett, and Pyskacek.

## CHAPTER 5: OFF-LOOP THEATRE, 1969 – 1984

Although Chicago's Off-Loop theatre scene seemed to explode from nowhere, as the previous chapters have shown it had deep roots in previous alternative theatre efforts. What emerged in 1969 as hippie theatres doing experimental work in converted storefronts grew into an art world with the ability to evolve and adapt to shifts in aesthetics, economics, and demographics: it developed quickly and rose to national prominence within fifteen years. The scene remained vital due to the fact that it was rooted in values and ideals - dispositions - that were widely held and shared among the theatre community. The "ghosts, images, and stereotypes" of the past exerted their influence on what subsequently developed.

What came about in 1969 succeeded because it was organic to the city. Whereas the regional theatre movement had seemed imported and imposed upon the city, and Bob Sickinger's Hull-House program was largely driven by one man's energy and vision, what began in Lincoln Park in 1969 was a collective, homegrown, and grass roots effort at making theatre that spoke to the city and the times directly. While it appeared to be new and unlike that which came before, it was actually built on a solid foundation of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre habitus, which had been developing since the 1890s. Sickinger's Hull-House theatre built an audience, trained actors and technicians, created facilities, and provided an aesthetic and operational model for alternative theatre. Sills' Second City and other efforts had already created a performance genre unique to the city. The attempts to establish a Guthrie-style regional theatre in Chicago throughout the 1950s and '60s had engaged artists, audiences, and philanthropists in discussion as to what Chicago's theatre *should* be. When something "new" emerged in 1969, the city was ready, willing, and able to embrace it.

The aesthetics of the early Off-Loop scene *were* new for Chicago: Sills' Story Theatre, drew on street theatre and improvisational aesthetics, June Pyskacek opened Kingston Mines with her production of the Open Theatre's *The Serpent*; The Organic Theatre drew on fantasy, mysticism, and improvisation in their early work, culminating in the *WARP!* trilogy. Much of this early work could be characterized as improvisational, free-form, non-realistic, non-narrative and/or unscripted – drawing heavily on myth, fantasy, and folklore for subjects. Aesthetically, it was very much in step with the countercultural ethos of its times. One might assume that the dispositions for community, collegiality, and ensemble that characterized this scene also had their origins in the counterculture, and no doubt in some cases – such as The Organic Theatre – they did. In the mid-1970s, with the success of David Mamet's work, the emergence of Steppenwolf, and critic Richard Christiansen's promotion to head critic at the *Tribune*, the overall aesthetic of Off-Loop theatre shifted towards the gritty, naturalistic, contemporary realism that we now tend to associate with the movement. Given this aesthetic shift, as well as the general change in the social tenor of the mid-1970s compared to the late 1960s, it would be reasonable to expect that the dispositions for community, collegiality, and ensemble – which seem very “hippie-ish” – might disappear or diminish as well. Instead, if anything, they became stronger in the Off-Loop theatre scene. I attribute this to the fact that these qualities are deeply rooted in Chicago's theatre history; they are part of the habitus. A brief overview of the history of the early Off-Loop theatre scene will show how the habitus structured the theatre scene.

The Body Politic was established by Rev. Jim Shiflett of the Community Arts Foundation as a community arts center, in a block slated for demolition under a hotly contested urban

renewal plan for Lincoln Park. Shiflett and Sills shared an interest in building community; Shiflett had an interest in improvisational theatre, and the CAF had been involved with administering grant money to Sills' Game Theatre in the mid-1960s. Gray states that Sills and pub owner Bruce Oxford approached Shiflett with the idea of purchasing the building on Lincoln and turning it into an arts center: rental income from Oxford's Pub and theatre tenants would cover the mortgage.<sup>981</sup> The building became headquarters for the CAF, as well as a home for Sills' new theatre, Body Politic. Three theatre spaces were eventually carved out of the space, and it "... became emblematic for a specific kind of theatre in Chicago called storefront theatre."<sup>982</sup> Pyskacek and the Chicago City Players were left out of the plan entirely.

Sills' new theatre opened in 1969; they presented Story Theatre productions of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and Grimm's fairy tales.<sup>983</sup> The shows were popular, and in 1970 Sills was offered an opportunity to produce Story Theatre in Los Angeles.<sup>984</sup> The name "Body Politic" came to apply to the entire building rather than the company, and what began as a community arts center offering a range of programs and arts classes, came to focus primarily on theatre.<sup>985</sup> Pyskacek, disregarded but not discouraged, established her own alternative theatre, Kingston Mines, in a former trolley barn one block north of the Body Politic space on Lincoln Ave. She staged *The Serpent* in 1969.<sup>986</sup>

---

<sup>981</sup> Gray, Stephen C. *A History of the Chicago Off-Loop Theatre Explosion: 1969 – 1989*. Diss. Ohio State U: 1997. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1999. Print. 122.

<sup>982</sup> Gleason, Catherine H. *Mapping the Lincoln Park Nexus: The Origin of the Chicago Off-Loop Theatre Movement*. Diss. U of Wisconsin-Madison, 2010. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2011. Print. 40.

<sup>983</sup> Gray 124.

<sup>984</sup> Sills, Kathleen. "The Inside Track to the Future: Chicago Theater, 1950–1971." Diss. Tufts U, 2001. Print. 173. Paul Sills returned to Chicago a few times in the later 1970s and '80s with productions, but never called the city home after 1970.

<sup>985</sup> Gleason 113. A Body Politic theatre ensemble was established later in the 1970s.

<sup>986</sup> Gleason 110; Sills diss. 174.



According to Pyskacek audiences were very responsive to the type of plays that Kingston Mines was producing. Pyskacek, like Sills, was producing plays that spoke to the period. Kingston Mines primarily attracted an alternative audience, one that was receptive to its experimental staging, choice of material, and nudity. She has stated that, although Chicago audiences at the time found Kingston Mines productions to be controversial, she was always aware that the shows had already been produced in New York. Pyskacek has said "I knew that my shows were cutting-edge for Chicago, but most of the time they weren't too cutting edge so as to alienate people."<sup>987</sup>

Before closing in 1973, Kingston Mines was home to about twenty productions, including the premiere of *Grease* in 1971, created by Hull-House theatre alumni Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey.<sup>988</sup>

In 1970, the Organic Theatre arrived in town. Led by native Chicagoan Stuart Gordon, the group originated at University of Wisconsin-Madison as a radical, hippie theatre collective. After running afoul of local authorities for staging a version of *Peter Pan* featuring nudity, Gordon, with the encouragement of Sills, decided to move the ensemble to Chicago.<sup>989</sup> The Organic was initially housed in a nearby church, but took over Sills' space at the Body Politic once he left for Los Angeles.<sup>990</sup> Other alternative theatre artists and ensembles also began to produce out of the Body Politic, and the space came to be something of an incubator for new

---

<sup>987</sup> Sills 175.

<sup>988</sup> Gray 135. Christiansen, Richard. *A Theater of Our Own: A History and a Memoir of 1,001 Nights in Chicago*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2004. Print. 154.

<sup>989</sup> Gray 124.

<sup>990</sup> Gray 124.

groups and new work.<sup>991</sup> In 1973, the Organic moved to the Leo Lerner theatre in the Uptown neighborhood, a space built by Sickinger's Hull-House program.<sup>992</sup>

An early challenge to the existence of the Off-Loop theatres became a formative moment of community building. In the early 1970s, the small theatres began to run afoul of city building inspectors. Chicago's building and fire code regulations for theatres had been written in response to the Iroquois Theatre fire in 1903, which killed over six hundred people.<sup>993</sup> The Iroquois was a proscenium theatre which seated sixteen hundred people on three levels and had numerous safety issues – such as exit doors that opened inward - which contributed to the high death toll.<sup>994</sup> Subsequent city regulations assumed that theatre buildings were purpose-built structures with a proscenium stage, and by law were required to have fixed seating, a brick proscenium, and an asbestos fire curtain in front of the stage. A performance space calling itself a theatre needed to comply with the fire code, pass an inspection, and only then could obtain a business license allowing it to operate – otherwise the city could close the theatre. This was the fate of Paul Sills' Playwrights Theatre Club in 1955.<sup>995</sup>

Body Politic attempted to circumvent the codes for theatres by calling itself a community center, but city building inspectors thought otherwise.<sup>996</sup> Other storefront spaces faced the same inspection and licensing situation. It was often financially prohibitive, if not

---

<sup>991</sup> Gray 130.

<sup>992</sup> Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 167; Gray 134.

<sup>993</sup> Brandt, Nat. *Chicago Death Trap: The Iroquois Theatre Fire of 1903*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2003. Print. 100.

<sup>994</sup> Brandt 13.

<sup>995</sup> Winer, Linda. "When is a Warehouse Not a Theater?" *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Nov. 19, 1972: M12. *ProQuest*. 25 Apr. 2013.

<sup>996</sup> Playwrights Theatre Club tried the same tactic, by calling themselves a "club," they argued that they were not a public venue. It did not work.

architecturally impossible, for a storefront theatre to conform to building regulations written for a large proscenium venue.<sup>997</sup> In 1972, Body Politic was notified by the city that they needed to make \$50,000 in ventilation improvements to bring their space up to code, but the Building Department “refused to issue a building permit because the space did not meet additional standards applying to professional theatres.”<sup>998</sup> It was estimated that getting Kingston Mines code-compliant would have cost \$300,000; instead, the space closed in 1973.<sup>999</sup> Under the existing codes, there was no legal way for storefront theatres to operate in Chicago.

In November 1972, Shiflett, with the support of *Sun-Times* critic Glenna Syse, convened a meeting of representatives of ten theatre groups to bring pressure on City Hall to alter the municipal codes to accommodate the fledging alternative theatre community.<sup>1000</sup> The effort was successful, and in May 1973, it was announced that Mayor Daley proposed creating a new business category in the Municipal Code: “Theatrical Community Centers,” which would allow storefront theatres to operate legally. Licensing fees were lowered; mechanical ventilation requirements and rules about parking spaces were also reduced to favor the small theatres.<sup>1001</sup>

The effort to amend the code for Off-Loop theatre was often portrayed as a “David vs. Goliath” battle at the time, but City Hall acquiesced quite readily to the theatre community’s demands. As a community arts center, Body Politic had been founded with the mission of healing and revitalizing the Lincoln Park neighborhood which had been torn apart in the wake

---

<sup>997</sup> Winer, “When is a Warehouse . . .”

<sup>998</sup> Winer, Linda. “Mull Theater Fate.” *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 26, 1972: 1. *ProQuest*. 25 Apr 2013.

<sup>999</sup> Gray 135.

<sup>1000</sup> Winer, Linda. “Codes Stymie Theater Groups.” *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Nov. 15, 1972: 1. *ProQuest*. 25 Apr. 2013.

<sup>1001</sup> “Change in Municipal Code: Daley Boost to Theaters.” *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* May 23, 1973: B1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 May 2018.

of the Daley-backed urban renewal project. This plan pitted low-income renters - often minorities and the elderly - against predominantly white homeowners, and had stalled in the face of neighborhood opposition.<sup>1002</sup> By 1973, the Mayor's office could evidently see that the storefront theatres were collectively making a positive change in a "blighted" neighborhood: while the theatres themselves were not exactly financially lucrative, their presence encouraged the renewal (or gentrification) process, as restaurants, bars, and boutiques began to open and proliferate in the area. It should also be remembered that Daley's 1966 "Program for the Arts in Chicago" had resulted in little more than bad feelings from the city's arts community: perhaps on some level, the Mayor recognized that something positive was happening in Lincoln Park which might erase this earlier and unsuccessful effort. For the Off-Loop theatre community, getting the code changed was formative because they had presented a united front and succeeded in bringing about a change that benefited everyone.

Soon after, and perhaps *because* the Mayor's office now saw the theatres in a positive light, the community received further help in the form of a federal jobs program. The Comprehensive Education and Training Act (CETA) of 1974 was a jobs-creation and employment training program which allowed cities to distribute federal money to local organizations. In Chicago, a portion of CETA funds were given to theatres and arts organizations which enabled the groups to employ their own ensemble members to perform administrative tasks such as ticket sales, grant writing, and marketing.<sup>1003</sup> Sharon Phillips began her career as a performer with Shiflett's group, the Dream Theatre, and later became business manager for the Body

---

<sup>1002</sup> Gleason 35.

<sup>1003</sup> Gray 28.

Politic. Phillips recalled:

The CETA money turned us overnight into responsible employers. We paid real salaries rather than cash shares out of the box office receipts. We offered real benefits like health insurance and IRA contributions. We even paid real employment taxes to the government. We became legitimate. A shock! But the CETA funds also enabled groups of artists to work as artists – have the luxury of long rehearsal periods – to experiment – to do work that we wanted to do rather than what we had to do. Unbelievable. The curse of the system was, of course, when the CETA funds disappeared a couple of years later, we didn't have enough money to replace them. Our artists had to go back to their non-artist jobs and weren't as willing to do developmental work just for love. Still we were able to sustain a small staff and had begun to understand that there was business to this theatre business.<sup>1004</sup>

CETA funding enabled the early Off-Loop theatre companies to grow into stable institutions rapidly.

Due to the revised Municipal Code and CETA funds, 1974 was a banner year for the Off-Loop theatre scene. Three new companies which would become major players in the scene formed that year: Wisdom Bridge, Victory Gardens and St. Nicholas. Additionally, in 1974 Greg Mosher was appointed artistic director of the Goodman Theatre's Stage Two program and brought the Goodman theatre to the forefront of the Off-Loop movement. Along with the

---

<sup>1004</sup> Phillips, Sharon. "A Theatrical Tapestry." *Resetting The Stage: Theater Beyond The Loop, 1960-1990*. Chicago: Chicago Public Library, 1990. 7 - 10. Print. 8.

already existing Organic and Body Politic, these new companies served as the basis for what came to be seen as the Off-Loop theatre explosion.<sup>1005</sup>

David Mamet's St. Nicholas Theatre would shift the existing paradigm of Off-Loop theatre in terms of aesthetics and approach. Mamet grew up in Chicago, had worked for Bob Sickinger's Hull-House theatre as a teenager, and spent his summers in college working as a busboy at Second City. He founded St. Nicholas with students he had taught at Goddard College in Vermont, and moved the company to Chicago in the early 1970s.<sup>1006</sup> St. Nicholas was basically an ensemble of four: Mamet, actor W.H. Macy, director Stephen Schacter, and administrator Patricia Cox.<sup>1007</sup> The company was founded to showcase Mamet's writing, although his best-known early work - *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *American Buffalo* - premiered at other Chicago theatres. More significantly, St. Nicholas reflected Mamet's sense of ambition and perfectionism in all aspects of their work – and it is not insignificant that Mamet himself cites Bob Sickinger as an influence: “Bob Sickinger was one of the greatest directors I’ve ever known. ( . . . ) he invented the Chicago theater of today.”<sup>1008</sup> The group put great energy and effort into their marketing, fundraising, and outreach programs. In 1975, they converted a former bakery and print shop at 2851 N. Halstead into a theatre complex, with a 226-seat theatre, offices, rehearsal space and classrooms.<sup>1009</sup> Gray notes that “St. Nicholas was a theatre company that changed the face of Off-Loop theatre through its professional and institutional ambitions. The theatre grew more rapidly and received national recognition sooner

---

<sup>1005</sup> Gray 1.

<sup>1006</sup> Gray 34.

<sup>1007</sup> The St. Nicholas ensemble was larger, but these four represent the core of the company according to Gray.

<sup>1008</sup> Zehme 52.

<sup>1009</sup> Gray 192.

than any other Off-Loop company.”<sup>1010</sup> St. Nicholas came to be the standard by which Off-Loop theatres measured success.

Mamet’s playwriting took him away from the group in 1976; other founding members also left, but St. Nicholas continued to grow. By the mid-1970s they had their own theatre, sold season subscription tickets, offered a full main-stage season, a second-stage season, children’s theatre, acting and dance classes. However, their rapid expansion incurred a large debt and insurmountable tax issues. The St. Nicholas juggernaut proved to be unsustainable, and the company went into a financial collapse in 1982.<sup>1011</sup> In many respects, St. Nicholas created the Steppenwolf Scenario: they were a group of friends from college who formed a theatre ensemble, worked hard, converted a space into a theatre, did realistic plays, earned critical praise, and quickly grew into an institution. They altered the habitus of the Off-Loop scene in that they took a more professional and “corporate” approach to their work, running the company more like a business and less like a commune - a practice that other companies came to emulate.

Further, the St. Nicholas aesthetic represents a break from the experimental and non-realistic work that had dominated the theatre scene prior to this time. “Mamet’s early work came to be identified as the quintessential Off-Loop style; tough, spare, gritty dialogue with a macho edge. The rough-and-tumble acting styles of the Steppenwolf and Remains ensembles were undoubtedly influenced by Mamet’s salty prose.”<sup>1012</sup> This aesthetic shift also coincides with Richard Christiansen’s move into the position of lead critic for the *Tribune*, and his

---

<sup>1010</sup> Gray 186.

<sup>1011</sup> Gray 206.

<sup>1012</sup> Gray 35.

quantifiable preference for gritty realism.<sup>1013</sup> What St. Nicholas did influenced others: their business practices, dramaturgy, and stage aesthetics shifted the habitus of the Off-Loop theatre scene, and helped create the Steppenwolf Scenario. Unfortunately, the way St. Nicholas ended did not make for a very inspiring story - the founders walked away, and the theatre failed. However, the Steppenwolf Theatre Company was following St. Nicholas' example when they began in 1976. At the same time, Mamet was inspired and influenced by Bob Sicking's work ethic, and applied it to his own company – this shows a more direct line of influence than is often the case in the habitus of Off-Loop theatre.

### **The Habitus of Off-Loop Theatre**

As I have shown in previous chapters, the roots of Off-Loop theatre go much deeper and reach much farther back than the establishment of Steppenwolf in 1976 or the beginning of the Off-Loop scene in 1969. How these roots feed the subsequent history and help create the current moment is a function of habitus. This habitus of alternative and non-commercial theatre efforts in Chicago created the Off-Loop scene. I began this study with the question of how Chicago theatre came to be as it is: what are the qualities that define it and where do they come from? I have looked for the sources and origins of these qualities – the dispositions - which produce habitus. This habitus created the Off-Loop theatre scene; the Steppenwolf Scenario evolved within the Off-Loop scene, and is a way in which this habitus is perpetuated and passed on. Habitus is both a product and a process: it is created by history, and creates a culture – that culture gave rise to the Steppenwolf Scenario.

---

<sup>1013</sup> Fosdick, Scott. "Newspaper Critic Shapes Chicago Style of Theater." *Newspaper Research Journal* 23.2/3 (2002): 114+. EBSCOhost. Web. 14 Nov. 2010.



The dispositions I identify as significant to constituting the habitus of Off-Loop theatre are: ensemble, collegiality, community, hard work, and perseverance. These are the “fuzzy and vague” things with which habitus is in “cahoots,” according to Bourdieu.<sup>1014</sup> These values, ideas, and ideals have been established, added to, handed down, and revised over time among practitioners in Chicago’s alternative theatre scenes. These dispositions are largely cultural and social: they are based on how theatre in Chicago has been practiced over time - Bourdieu calls it a *Theory of Practice* for this reason. Another set of dispositions that figure into the habitus are based in the material conditions and practical realities of doing non-profit alternative theatre in Chicago. These are: small and intimate stages, performance spaces created out of converted spaces, and a propensity to do contemporary and realistic plays. All of these dispositions – the social and cultural and the material and practical – predate the Off-Loop theatre scene.

As Bourdieu states, habitus is fuzzy and vague; it is impossible to prove *where* “a preference to value ‘a sense of ensemble’” began, or exactly *how* it was transmitted from one person to another over time. What *is* clear is that in looking at the history of alternative theatre production in Chicago over a long span of time, the notion that ensemble is a good idea and a valued quality has shown a remarkable persistence and resilience over time; it keeps coming back and being refined – and in the work of Spolin and Sills with improvisation, the ensemble becomes the source of the performance. Ensemble is hardly unique or particular to Chicago, but in its various connotations - as an organizational structure, as a performative quality, as an aesthetic principle, etc. - it occupies a place of central importance in the cultural imaginary of

---

<sup>1014</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loïc J. D. Wacquant. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1992. Print. 22.

the city's theatre scene, so much so that it has come to be a defining characteristic of Chicago's theatre. It is so much a part of the fabric of the theatre scene, that it is rarely questioned or even considered. In Bourdieu's terms, it is *doxa*: it is that way because that is the way it is.

The disposition for ensemble gets expressed as the preference for Chicago theatre companies to organize themselves into groups, and work as a dedicated company of artists over a long period of time. There is a tendency to look to the group for mutual support and artistic opportunity, and to consider the ensemble as an artistic home. Beyond the organizational sense, there is also a respect for those who work collectively and democratically, a preference for putting the good of the group above the individual, and admiration for an "ensemble performance," in which all players share the scene and support one another equally onstage.

The disposition for collegiality ties to ensemble, but also gets expressed in terms of the sense of openness within the theatre community: it is often characterized as a welcoming and inclusive art world, with relatively few barriers to entry. The Off-Loop theatre scene has been noted for the way theatre companies and ensembles support one another's efforts, rather than eye each other as competition. This is not to say that competition is absent, but rather that success is not seen as coming at the expense of another: actor William Petersen once remarked that, "Everybody helps everybody here. We compete amongst each other, not against each other."<sup>1015</sup> Theater companies tend to assist and support one another – sharing facilities and pooling resources, often sharing performers, and there is a long history of established groups co-producing with newer ensembles. In one example, Sharon Phillips of Body Politic recalls:

---

<sup>1015</sup> Zehme, Bill. "Hot Chicago." *Vanity Fair* Nov. 1984: 50-115. Print. 54.

In the spring of 1979, the BP announced that it would “go under” if it didn’t raise \$26,000 in four weeks. Unbeknownst to us, League members stuffed their theater programs with flyers asking patrons to send \$1.50 to the BP. Lots of people did just that. I would burst into tears with each mail delivery.<sup>1016</sup>

This sense of collegiality is related to the disposition for community which gets expressed in the widely shared perception, both internally and externally, that the Off-Loop theatre scene *is* a community. In the mid-1980s, as Chicago theatre rose to national prominence and was featured in the national press, the sense of community was noted as one of its most significant traits: “‘What’s different about Chicago,’ according to Gregory Mosher, the passionate artistic director of the Goodman, ‘is that we encourage and reward a sense of community.’”<sup>1017</sup> In *A Theatre of Our Own, A History and Memoir of 1001 Nights in Chicago*, Richard Christensen characterized the theatre scene he covered for nearly forty years as critic for the *Chicago Daily News and Tribune*:

Chicago is a city where theatre is produced for the sake of producing theatre. In the middle of the country, it has a theater scene removed from the immediate influence of Broadway and the movies. It does not have the high-stakes economy of New York, and it does not have the television and film-driven business of Los Angeles. What it has is a theater community and people eager to work in that community.<sup>1018</sup>

---

<sup>1016</sup> Phillips, “A Theatrical Tapestry” 9.

<sup>1017</sup> Zehme, “Hot Chicago.” 52.

<sup>1018</sup> Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 288.

Since the beginning of Off-Loop theatre, there is a tradition of coming together as a community to confront issues or address concerns that impact the scene: this began in 1972, when Shiflett led the effort that created the “theatrical community center” designation in the Municipal Code.<sup>1019</sup> In 1974 the first cooperative organization, the Chicago Alliance of Performing Arts (CAPA) was formed. CAPA was superseded in 1979 by the League of Chicago Theatres, which today represents over two hundred theatre groups.<sup>1020</sup> While the League is often pointed to as the most obvious example of community-mindedness, this is continually reasserted and reinvented: in 2016, the theatre community came together over sexual discrimination and sexual harassment issues, and the Not In Our House movement was created. The website states their mission in an especially Off-Loop-style of rhetoric “Join us as we lead a cultural shift to strengthen our collective experience by working together to protect and develop our artists, our theatres, and our Chicago Theatre Community.”<sup>1021</sup>

The disposition for community relates back to the previous two: ensemble and collegiality, but it also extends beyond the Off-Loop theatre scene to the greater civic community. Chicago is characterized as a city of neighborhoods, and Off-Loop theatre groups often become highly identified with the neighborhoods in which they are located. The scene has become what Bob Sickingner hoped it would in 1965, when he expressed the hope that “Just as one has a doctor on the way home or a dentist or a school, there should be a performing arts

---

<sup>1019</sup> “Change in Municipal Code: Daley Boost to Theaters.” *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* May 23, 1973: B1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 Apr 2013; Winer, “Codes Stymie Theater Groups.”

<sup>1020</sup> Gray 29; *League of Chicago Theatres*. “About Us.” 25 May 2018. [www.chicagoplays.com](http://www.chicagoplays.com).

<sup>1021</sup> *#NotInOurHouse, A Chicago Theatre Community*. 25 May 2018. [www.notinourhouse.org](http://www.notinourhouse.org); Levitt, Aimee and Christopher Piatt, “At Profiles Theatre the Drama – and Abuse – is Real.” *Chicago Reader*. [www.chicagoreader.com](http://www.chicagoreader.com). June 8, 2016: n. pag. Web. 5 May 2018.

center in each neighborhood. In each neighborhood there should be art. And if we have this then we will have all we ever need.”<sup>1022</sup>

Finally, the disposition for community also figures into the type of work presented: the Chicago audience enjoys seeing itself portrayed on stage - Alice Gerstenberg may have been the first to recognize this in the 1930s with her long-running and often-revised piece *When Chicago Was Young*. Paul Sills realized this early on with The Compass and Second City, since improv so often draws inspiration and suggestions from the lives and experiences of its audience, and David Mamet’s early plays succeeded because he captured the sounds and images of the city. The Organic moved from the fringe to the mainstream in the late 1970s with a string of ensemble-created, naturalistic portrayals of blue-collar Chicago life: *Cops*, *E/R: Emergency Room* and perennial favorite *Bleacher Bums*, which depicts Cubs fans.<sup>1023</sup> Community, in its various connotations, is also doxa in Chicago theatre.<sup>1024</sup>

As with ensemble, collegiality, and community, the dispositions to value hard work and perseverance are also intertwined. It can easily be argued that valuing hard work is a legacy of the city’s long history of industrial labor. It seems self-evident that a city built by immigrants working in factories *would* tend to instill a respect for hard work; and while I do not dispute this as a possible source for the disposition, it is also worth remembering that Chicago’s civic history is filled with examples of gangsters, robber barons, and corrupt politicians who achieved success by means *other* than hard work. In other words, the urban repertoire offered *other* examples and values that *could* have been adapted and incorporated into the theatre habitus,

---

<sup>1022</sup> Jacobi, Peter P. “Culture – Does Anyone Really Care?” *Chicago Magazine* Winter 1965: 62 – 71. Print. 67.

<sup>1023</sup> Gray 171-4.

<sup>1024</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 167.

but were not. “Overnight success” is a largely unknown trope in Chicago theatre, at least for the individual: success was often viewed as a group effort. In 1984, when the Off-Loop scene was the subject of a *Vanity Fair* feature, Roche Schulfer of the Goodman observed, “There are no overnight sensations. For ten years, we’ve sort of had one giant Chicago theater company. Now, all of a sudden, people are being acknowledged for work they’ve been doing for years.”<sup>1025</sup> Perhaps this is so because the habitus of Off-Loop theatre was forged outside of commercial theatre practice, and the “overnight sensation” and “instant fame” tropes are associated with Broadway and Hollywood.

Finally, and related to the disposition for hard work, there is an admiration for those who demonstrate perseverance, which often takes the form of failing and trying again. Once again, it can be argued that this is also based in civic history: Chicago’s ability to rise from the ashes of the 1871 fire is expressed in its city motto, “I Will.” It is also a symptom of the “Second City” syndrome: the innate urge to prove better than second-best, to succeed despite the odds against you. Again, one can look to the urban repertoire and see this reflected in the propensity for Chicago to attach the modifier “World’s...” to so many things; i.e., World’s tallest building, World’s busiest airport, World’s greatest newspaper, etc. Again, I do not doubt that this could be the source, but within the theatre scene the idea of perseverance often becomes what Gary Houston calls “a vital arrogance:”

Fueled by this chutzpah, they come with the idea of Chicago as a new home, as a cultural wasteland awaiting their fertilization and, most fascinatingly, as a thing to be overthrown. What’s to be overthrown simply consists of the prevalent kind

---

<sup>1025</sup> Zehme 52.

or kinds of theater they see when they get here. The older theaters and, often, the actors they are fond of using are liable to be seen by the hungry new kids on the block as media-sanctified, overrated, bloated. In short, seen in a cockeyed way as the Establishment – never mind that in fact they are probably struggling just as hard to stay in business as are the newcomers to open theirs.<sup>1026</sup>

It is a spirit of “We’ll show you!” As much as this sort of persistence or arrogance fuels the scene, “permission to fail” is also one of its most salient features. In the low-budget, low-critical-stakes world of storefront theatre, a bad review or box office failure are generally not enough to end a career. Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre scene developed *because* it gave young artists a place to try new things and learn their craft. This feature has been preserved or – perhaps more accurately – not interfered with, in the way that the Off-Off-Broadway scene was damaged by the efforts of Actors Equity to regulate it. The Off-Loop theatre community offers space in which one can try, fail, and learn. The ability to get up and try again – to persevere and persist – is admired.

The material conditions of doing theatre in Chicago have also contributed to the habitus in formative ways. Much of Off-Loop theatre occurs in relatively small performance venues created out of converted spaces, often former storefronts. Theatres are usually one hundred seats or less and frequently utilize a thrust stage. This practice is deeply rooted: taking a cue from Anna Morgan, Maurice Browne and Ellen Van Volkenburg were the first to convert a commercial space into a theatre. At that time, it was a concession to the fact that they had little

---

<sup>1026</sup> Houston, Gary. “A Vital Arrogance.” *Resetting The Stage: Theater Beyond The Loop, 1960-1990*. Chicago: Chicago Public Library, 1990. 16 – 22. Print. 19.

money, and they had learned from Donald Robertson's efforts that their potential audience was likely to be small. Chicago, then as now, had few formal venues appropriately affordable and small-scale enough to work: so "little theatre" was born. In the early 1950s, Playwrights Theatre Club turned a former Chinese restaurant into a theatre, and in the late 1950s, the Second City did the same thing with a former Chinese laundry. In the 1960s, Bob Siskinger's Hull-House Theatre created a theatre within the Jane Addams Center in Lakeview, itself a former American Legion post, a space that would later house Steppenwolf. The Off-Loop scene began with Body Politic and Kingston Mines, both located in commercial structures repurposed into performance spaces.

As the Off-Loop scene developed in the early 1970s, Chicago had no shortage of vacant storefront space, and Off-Loop theatre is often called "storefront theatre" for this reason. Generally, these were to be found in commercial buildings dating from approximately 1900 to the 1930s: the street-level storefronts tended to be twenty to twenty-five feet in width, often fifty feet or more in length, with ceilings high enough to allow for stage lighting overhead, and located on main streets in city neighborhoods. These spaces were plentiful and affordable. Lewis Lazare wrote about the economic landscape of Off-Loop theatre in the early days of the Off-Loop scene:

...the myriad deserted storefronts and loft spaces throughout the city's neighborhoods made it easy for fledgling theater companies to find a first home. Wisdom Bridge Theatre opened in 1974 in a raw second-story space on Howard Street. The defunct St. Nicholas Theater Company, Victory Gardens Theater, and Steppenwolf all made use of cheap, accessible space that could easily be



adapted for theatrical use. These were not the plush facilities familiar to frequent visitors to Loop theaters, but they were a beginning point for ambitious, determined companies.<sup>1027</sup>

The small spaces put actors and audience in close proximity and factored into the play selection, acting style, and design aesthetic, as did small budgets. In such spaces and under such conditions, contemporary, realistic plays with minimal settings worked well. Gleason recounts her experience of working in a storefront theatre:

Some of the most exciting and interesting productions I have ever directed have been in storefront theatres in Chicago. Of all of these, I found the Heartland Theatre in Rogers Park the most challenging. At no more than fifteen feet wide, the playing space barely contained the seven actors in the play. The house held about fifty people and the stage manager had to lie on a carpeted floor in a loft above the “lobby” while running the very primitive light board. While the Heartland is one of the smallest of Chicago’s Off-Loop storefront theatres, it represents a particular kind of indigenous Chicago theatre.<sup>1028</sup>

This “particular kind of indigenous Chicago theatre” is determined by the limitations under which it is created: the small scale of the spaces, small budgets, and limited technical facilities shift the focus onto the acting, directing, and writing. As Scott Fosdick notes in “Newspaper Critic Shapes Chicago Style of Theatre,” “The ideal of naturalistic theater that hurls raw, sweating life into the laps of the audience is easier to achieve when those laps are five rather

---

<sup>1027</sup> Lazare, Lewis. “The Economic Landscape” *Resetting The Stage: Theater Beyond The Loop, 1960-1990*. Chicago: Chicago Public Library, 1990. 27 - 32. Print. 29.

<sup>1028</sup> Gleason 1.

than 25 feet from the actors.”<sup>1029</sup> In “Not Just Rock ‘n’ Roll: Chicago Theatre 1984 – 1990,” Julie Jackson discusses the vaunted “Chicago-style” of acting that gained fame in the 1980s as a type of naturalism that broke down the imaginary fourth-wall, turning the stage into an “acting platform” rather than a mirror of reality. “But the naturalism that characterized Chicago-style theatre lies somewhere in the superimposed margins of illusion and reality, absence and presence, character and actor.”<sup>1030</sup> The small spaces amplified the electricity and intensity of the acting.

The limitations of space and budgets impacted design. Kevin Rigdon, resident designer for Steppenwolf stated:

“Back then,” Rigdon explained, “we weren’t interested in windows and doors. The closer the actor gets to an item, the more real it needs to be. If you didn’t touch it, you didn’t need it.” In the cramped and makeshift performance spaces of the Steppenwolf’s early homes, Rigdon gave the actors what they most wanted and needed – a barebones production style that indexed the company’s powerful actor/audience dynamic.<sup>1031</sup>

These aesthetic choices– emotionally intense, naturalistic acting coupled with an approach to design that Jackson calls “theatrical essentialism” – remain characteristic of Off-Loop theater. Both are driven by, and work best in, small theatre spaces.

---

<sup>1029</sup> Fosdick, Scott. “Newspaper Critic Shapes Chicago Style of Theater.” *Newspaper Research Journal* 23.2/3 (2002): 114+. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 14 Nov. 2010. 125.

<sup>1030</sup> Jackson, Julie. “Not Just Rock ‘N’ Roll: Chicago Theatre, 1984-1990.” *Theatre History Studies* 36 (2017): 75-111. Print. 96.

<sup>1031</sup> Jackson 95.

*Tribune* critic Richard Christiansen's preferences reinforced the emphasis on realistic plays and naturalistic performances.<sup>1032</sup> Fosdick's research on theater reviews in Chicago newspapers between 1975 and 1985, concludes that *Tribune* critic Richard Christiansen had an overwhelming influence in championing what became recognized as "Chicago style" theatre. Based on press coverage at the time, Fosdick characterized it as realistic and contemporary plays (as opposed to classics or experimental and avant-garde work), the acting was the most notable feature, described as "raw, humane and passionate - naturalistic in the extreme."<sup>1033</sup>

...those who examine the evidence closely share the conclusion that Christiansen had a profound influence on an important period in the development of theatre in Chicago. In short, the kind of theatre Christiansen liked flourished and flourished so completely that it became known as the Chicago Style. The kinds of theatre Christiansen did not like dwindled.<sup>1034</sup>

The most influential critic's preference for realism and naturalism could not help but influence the local predilection for these types of plays and this type of acting – and so they too became part of the habitus.

As stated earlier, the habitus created the Off-Loop theatre scene; the Steppenwolf Scenario evolved out of it, and is the mechanism by which the Off-Loop theatre scene is perpetuated. Scenarios, according to Taylor, develop over time, through repetition; they are built on tradition, customs, stories, mythology, the ghosts of the past – in short, fuzzy and vague things. "The scenario structures our understanding. It also haunts our present, a form of

---

<sup>1032</sup> Fosdick 125.

<sup>1033</sup> Fosdick 124.

<sup>1034</sup> Fosdick 118.

hauntology that resuscitates and reactivates old dramas.”<sup>1035</sup> The long historical development of Off-Loop theatre’s habitus supplies some of the ghosts and images that haunt the Steppenwolf Scenario: others developed after 1969. It is first necessary to separate myth from history regarding the Steppenwolf Theatre Company, to see how the Scenario came into being, and understand how it structures Chicago’s theatre community.

### **Steppenwolf Theatre Company, 1976 - 1984**

As noted in the introduction, my master’s thesis focused on articulating the Steppenwolf Scenario as a phenomenon that structured the Off-Loop theatre scene: it looked at the product of the history that I am examining in this study. This section presents a brief history of the early years of the Steppenwolf ensemble, to help differentiate their history from the mythology contained in the Steppenwolf Scenario.<sup>1036</sup>

The Steppenwolf Theatre Company began at Illinois State University in 1976. The name of the group came from a community theatre started by Jeff Perry and Gary Sinise when they were high school students in Highland Park, a suburb located twenty-five miles north of Chicago. In 1973, Perry, Sinise, and other friends produced Paul Zindel’s *And Miss Reardon Drinks A Little* at a church, followed by a very popular production of *Grease*. Perry left to attend Illinois State University in 1974; there, he met Terry Kinney and convinced him to come back with him to Highland Park the following summer to stage Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.<sup>1037</sup>

---

<sup>1035</sup> Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. Print. 28.

<sup>1036</sup> This section contains material that originally appeared in my MA thesis. Epplert, Shannon. “The Influence of the Steppenwolf Script On Chicago’s Off-Loop Theatre.” MA Thesis. Illinois State U, 2011. Print.

<sup>1037</sup> Mayer, John. *The Steppenwolf Theatre Company of Chicago, 1974 – 1982*. Diss. U Missouri-Columbia, 1993. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1993. Print. 16.

Perry and Kinney returned to ISU in the fall and began work on an off-campus production of Pinter's *The Homecoming* that involved Sinise.<sup>1038</sup> "Faculty opposed having the department's best actors and scholarship students committing their time to an off-campus production" and put a halt to the play.<sup>1039</sup> In protest, Perry, Kinney, and Sinise decided to start their own theatre ensemble. Founding member Nancy Evans, recalled:

I was invited to a meeting in 1976. I think Jeff invited me to go, and John [Malkovich]. A friend of theirs, Gary Sinise, was going to be there and wanted to talk with us. So I said sure.

I went into this conference room and literally everybody in the theatre department that I had respect for was in that room. There were maybe fifteen of us altogether, and Gary was sitting in the corner, just off to the side. They just started to talk to us about how Steppenwolf was a germ in their minds when they were in high school, and had come up with the name based on the Hermann Hesse novel, and they said they wanted to put this company together and be the best theatre in the world.<sup>1040</sup>

The final group came down to nine members: Perry, Kinney, Sinise, Nancy Evans, Laurie Metcalf, Moira Harris, John Malkovich, H.E. Baccus, and Alan Wilder.<sup>1041</sup>

They decided to start the company in Highland Park. Sinise and Perry had incorporated the name "Steppenwolf Theatre Company" when they were in high school, so they continued

---

<sup>1038</sup> Sinise was not a student at the time, he is the only founding member of Steppenwolf who did not attend ISU.

<sup>1039</sup> Gray 281.

<sup>1040</sup> Mayer 63.

<sup>1041</sup> Mayer 64.

to use it.<sup>1042</sup> Sinise obtained space in the Immaculate Conception Church School in Highland Park, where they created an 88-seat theatre and thrust stage in the basement. Their first production opened July 22, 1976, a rotating bill of four one-acts: *The Lover* by Harold Pinter, *Birdbath* by Leonard Melfi, *The Lesson* by Eugene Ionesco, and *The Indian Wants the Bronx* by Israel Horowitz. The productions were reviewed by the *Chicago Reader*, a weekly alternative newspaper that covered theatre extensively.

In October, they staged Hugh Wheeler's *Look We've Come Through*, their first show to be reviewed by Richard Christiansen. He was then a critic at the *Chicago Daily News*, but would soon move to the *Tribune*, becoming the most influential theatre critic in Chicago. His review of *Look We've Come Through* begins "There's an interesting and very young theatre company developing quietly but impressively in the tiny basement space of the Immaculate Conception school at 770 Deerfield Rd. in Highland Park." Later in the review, he describes the company as "...a small, tightly knit company that needs development in technique; but it's a smart, talented post graduate group whose aspirations toward serious work appear justified."<sup>1043</sup>

Their plan was always to move the company into Chicago: they presented their work in the city whenever they could, but the company spent their first four years of existence headquartered in Highland Park. In May 1977, they remounted *Indian Wants the Bronx* and *Birdbath* at the Jane Addams Center theatre, a former Hull-House space. In 1978, Steven Schachter cast most of the ensemble in the St. Nicholas Theatre production of Lanford Wilson's *Fifth of July*. "Schachter reportedly wanted to work with the ensemble, using their energy and

---

<sup>1042</sup> Gray 283.

<sup>1043</sup> Christiansen, *A Theatre of Our Own* 20.

rapport in this play about '60s radicals coming to terms with their past relationships.

Steppenwolf benefitted by getting the exposure and prestige associated with an appearance at the well-known St. Nicholas."<sup>1044</sup> In January 1979, most of the ensemble was again cast in a commercial production of Ralph Pape's *Say Goodnight, Gracie* directed by Austin Pendleton.<sup>1045</sup> It ran for three weeks at the Theatre Building, then moved to the Ruth Page Auditorium and ran for five more weeks. These high-profile productions helped to cement the ensemble's popularity and raise their profile.

In 1980, the company made the Jane Addams Center their permanent home. There, they mounted two of their seminal shows, Lanford Wilson's *Balm in Gilead* in 1980 and Sam Shepard's *True West* in 1982.<sup>1046</sup> Both productions had extended runs in Chicago, and later transferred to New York. *Balm in Gilead* put Steppenwolf on the map in Chicago: Wilson's 1965 play about the lowlifes, junkies, and prostitutes who frequent an all-night diner in New York was both the perfect challenge and ideal vehicle for the company. Richard Christiansen loved it, and *Sun-Times* critic Glenna Syse stated:

If good theatre is that which makes you care and hurt and laugh and sorrow, then the Steppenwolf Theatre Company production of Lanford Wilson's "Balm in Gilead" is not merely good. It is simply great. This is one of the most affecting theatrical productions I have seen in many a season. When I left 3212 N. Broadway Thursday evening, a personal dichotomy set in – a conflict of depression and despair struggling against an uncommon admiration for the

---

<sup>1044</sup> Gray 204-5.

<sup>1045</sup> Mayer 132.

<sup>1046</sup> Gray 302, 308.

excellence of performance and production.<sup>1047</sup>

Steppenwolf's next major success was *True West*, which opened in April 1982. The production subsequently moved to the Apollo Theatre for an extended run in July and August of that year.

Sinise, acting as artistic director of the company, moved *True West* to New York, although the decision was contested within the ensemble at the time. "Should they keep their vow to stay pure, poor, and together in Chicago or should they help each other make it in the larger world of New York and Hollywood and risk losing their sense of belonging to an artistic family?"<sup>1048</sup> Despite opposition, Sinise prevailed in the matter; the show moved to the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York in the fall of 1982 and ran for over seven hundred performances. Mel Gussow of the *New York Times* called the production, " ...an exhilarating confluence of writing, acting, and staging. ( . . . ) this is the true 'True West.'"<sup>1049</sup> In 1992, Sinise stated that taking the show to New York was a calculated move:

The whole purpose for me as the artistic director in choosing to take *True West* to New York was to build strength in Chicago. It did nothing but make us more popular there – which made it possible in the long run to build the building we have today. It was only through becoming more of a nationally recognized organization that we could draw more national funding.<sup>1050</sup>

Following the success of *True West*, *Balm in Gilead* transferred to Public Theatre in New York in

---

<sup>1047</sup> Syse, Glenna. "Steppenwolf's Grim Balm in Gilead Simply Great Theatre." *Chicago Sun-Times* Sept. 10, 1980: 14. *Newsbank*. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.

<sup>1048</sup> Gray 309.

<sup>1049</sup> Gussow, Mel. "Stage: Shepard's 'West' Revived and Restored." *New York Times* Oct. 18, 1982: C18. *ProQuest*. Web. 30 June 2011.

<sup>1050</sup> Terry, Clifford. "Sinise to Steinbeck to Sinise: A Lifelong Passion Comes to the Screen." *Chicago Tribune (1963 – Current file)* Sept. 13, 1992: 134. *ProQuest*. Web. 3 June 2018.



June 1984, and other Steppenwolf productions soon followed.<sup>1051</sup>

With the string of successful New York transfers in the 1980s, and the burgeoning careers of several individual ensemble members, it was widely expected that Steppenwolf would be leaving Chicago. In 1984, the company held a press conference to announce their upcoming season, but the real purpose “was to quell suspicions that success in New York City would lead to the breaking up of the ensemble.” That day, Perry stated:

The rare trust and knowledge between ourselves and our audience, coupled with the fact that we can be left relatively free to create in Chicago without overwhelming economic and media pressure make it imperative that Chicago remain the base of our operations.<sup>1052</sup>

Steppenwolf’s success in New York, followed by their announcement that they would be staying in Chicago, was an important moment for Off-Loop theatre. Prior to this, St. Nicholas had been the model for a successful Chicago theatre company; David Mamet and other founding members had all left Chicago by the early 1980s and the company folded in 1982. Steppenwolf wrote a new ending to what had been an evolving narrative regarding Chicago theatre: it now had a happy ending, and the fairy tale of Chicago’s Off-Loop theatre scene came to be haunted by Steppenwolf.

### **The Steppenwolf Scenario**

In 1988, Mark Milliken, the artistic director of Immediate Theatre, stated, “We began by trying to get enough money to do a show, hoping we’d land on the cover of the *Tribune* arts

---

<sup>1051</sup> This section is based on material that originally appeared in my thesis. Epplert, Shannon. “The Influence of the Steppenwolf Script On Chicago's Off-Loop Theatre.” MA Thesis. Illinois State U, 2011. Print.

<sup>1052</sup> Christiansen, “Success Won’t Break Up the Gang....”

section and be announced as the next Steppenwolf.”<sup>1053</sup> By the mid-1980s, being proclaimed “the next Steppenwolf” had come to serve as shorthand for success in Chicago theatre.<sup>1054</sup> As a “meaning-making paradigm,” the Steppenwolf Scenario developed between 1969 and 1984; it was the ultimate expression of the habitus of Off-Loop theatre. It can be stated as a fairytale-like narrative: a group of college friends move to Chicago and start a theatre company; they do gritty, realistic, contemporary plays in a converted storefront; the critics discover them, the theatre is a success and grows into an institution; the ensemble members go on to greater fame, but always have their artistic home to return to....and they all lived happily ever after. In broad strokes, that *is* Steppenwolf’s story, but they in turn were following practices that had already been established within the habitus of Off-Loop theatre at the time. Within Steppenwolf’s history, the habitus of Off-Loop theatre distills into the Steppenwolf Scenario; this narrative helps to perpetuate and structure the theatre community.

Taylor states that scenarios include narrative and plot, they are;

Simultaneously setup and action, scenarios frame and activate social dramas.

The setup lays out the range of possibilities; all the elements are there:

encounter, conflict, resolution, and denouement, for example. These elements,

of course, are themselves the product of economic, political, and social

structures that they, in turn tend to reproduce. All scenarios have localized

meaning, though many attempt to pass as universally valid. Actions and

---

<sup>1053</sup> Lazare, Lewis. “Immediate Theatre Returns Promise to its Future.” *Crain’s Chicago Business* Feb. 15, 1988: 47. ProQuest. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.

<sup>1054</sup> This section contains material that originally appeared in my MA thesis, “The Influence of the Steppenwolf Script On Chicago’s Off-Loop Theatre.”

behaviors arising from the setup might be predictable, a seemingly natural consequence of the assumptions, values, goals power relations, presumed audience, and epistemic grids established by the setup itself. But they are ultimately, flexible and open to change.<sup>1055</sup>

The Steppenwolf Scenario is a path to success, but it also reproduces much of what came before – ensembles of middle-class, heterosexual, white people doing a specific kind of theatre. It assumes participants had the opportunity to attend college and have the freedom to pursue theatre as a career. Further, it assumes participants have a network of supportive colleagues with which to form a theatre company, and access to the social and economic capital with which to do so. It is also true that its meaning is highly localized: the Steppenwolf Scenario's only point of reference is Chicago, and the success promised is particular to Off-Loop theatre. Ultimately, the Steppenwolf Scenario exists because it works for some; Lookingglass Theatre is an example, but David Schwimmer wearing his Lookingglass t-shirt at press events for *Friends* in the 1990s perhaps only "played" in Chicago.

Once the Off-Loop scene was established, elements of the Steppenwolf Scenario began to develop. One can see how the elements of the Scenario come together in Steppenwolf's story in their early press coverage; as the company became more prominent, articles often contained a thumbnail company history. Richard Christiansen, writing about the company in 1980, characterized their past in this way:

They had arrived in 1976 in Highland Park, where Sinise and Perry had attended high school. Most of them also had graduated or otherwise departed

---

<sup>1055</sup> Taylor 28-9.

from Illinois State University, filled with the postcollege, idealistic belief that, in Kinney's words, "We would start a theatre on our own and starve awhile."

They started their theatre in a church school basement they rented for \$10 a month, and they starved, keeping themselves going with day jobs as cooks, waiters, and salesmen in shopping centers while they worked in the theatre at night. Sometimes, they made what Malkovich calls "a killing" by selling apple cider at intermission.

Nevertheless, the 88-seat theatre in the Immaculate Conception School at 770 Deerfield Rd. in Highland Park soon became a regular stepping-off place for theatergoers who found the place vibrating with all kinds of talent and energy.<sup>1056</sup>

*Tribune* writer Clifford Terry's 1982 account contains more editorializing:

Perhaps what is most remarkable, others have pointed out, is that most of the ensemble met as students at *Illinois State University*, which is not exactly the Julliard of the Midwest, and started their professional careers in *Highland Park*, of all places [. . .].

In the Spring of '76 Sinise located new space, the basement of the Immaculate Conception School in the same suburb – quarters, one reviewer noted, that scarcely seemed large enough for a game of shuffleboard. That summer a core of nine performers [...] – all, except for Sinise, graduates of I.S.U.

---

<sup>1056</sup> Christiansen, Richard. "Spirited Troupe Successfully Clears Hurdles of Indecision." *Chicago Tribune* (1963-*Current file*) Mar. 2, 1980: E8. *ProQuest*. Web. 14 Nov. 2010.

– built a theatre there.<sup>1057</sup>

In the early 1980s, the national press took notice of what was happening in Chicago theatre. In Bill Zehme's 1984 *Vanity Fair* article, Steppenwolf's story becomes more condensed:

The company, which borrowed its name from Hermann Hesse, was made up mainly of people who had acted together at Illinois State University at Normal. They started out in a parochial-school basement in Highland Park, a northern suburb. After four years of strong press support, they moved into Chicago proper and continued to show a real genius for tough, original interpretation. A perfect example of this, in the opinion of artistic director Jeff Perry, was their production of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*.<sup>1058</sup>

By 1984, Richard Christiansen – Steppenwolf's longtime champion – had boiled the company's history down to a one-paragraph rags-to-riches story that culminates with John Malkovich becoming a star.<sup>1059</sup> The way Steppenwolf was portrayed in the press certainly contributed to the development of the Scenario and Steppenwolf's identification with it, but the elements of the Scenario were already in place when Steppenwolf began.

That Chicago's theatre companies tend to have their roots in college theatre programs began to be acknowledged in the press in the late 1970s. In *A History of the Chicago Off-Loop Theatre Explosion: 1969 – 1989*, Gray notes:

In the '70s and '80s, Chicago became the big city destination for many actors

---

<sup>1057</sup> Terry, Clifford. "Steppin' Out with the Steppenwolf." *Chicago Tribune* (1963 – Current file) Mar. 21, 1982: J36. ProQuest. Web. 14 Nov. 2010.

<sup>1058</sup> Zehme 114.

<sup>1059</sup> Christiansen, Richard. "Play by Play, Minor Leaguers Rise to the Majors." *Chicago Tribune* (1963 – Current file) Dec. 9, 1984: K5. ProQuest. Web. 15 Nov 2010.

looking for a livable city in which to start their own theatre careers. The pattern, continuing in the '90s, is that each new season brings the graduating classes from what seems like at least half of the theatre departments in the Midwest to Chicago to start their own theatre companies.<sup>1060</sup>

Four of the eight Off-Loop companies that Gray details had their origins at colleges or in university programs: Steppenwolf members met at Illinois State University, the Organic formed at University of Wisconsin-Madison, St. Nicholas was founded by David Mamet with his students from Goddard College in Vermont, and Victory Gardens began with Dennis Zacek of Loyola University.<sup>1061</sup>

As the theatre scene became established in the early '70s, word spread that the city was a good place to start a theatre career. The success of Body Politic, Kingston Mines and the Organic Theatre helped pave the way for St. Nicholas, Wisdom Bridge, and Victory Gardens in 1974, Steppenwolf in 1976 and Remains Theatre in 1979. The quick growth of these companies, moving from storefront theatres into institutions within about five years, helped to inspire another wave of theatres founded by college friends that proliferated through the 1980s. By the early '80s, starting an Off-Loop theatre company with college classmates was an established trope. In a 1984 *Tribune* article, author Deborah L. Wood describes the Off-Loop scene for the uninitiated: "Chicago's theatre community – and it is a community – is mainly young – and restless. A striking number of theatre staff members are recent college graduates who,

---

<sup>1060</sup> Gray 15.

<sup>1061</sup> Gray 15.

dismayed at the grueling audition circuit, start their own companies.”<sup>1062</sup> She goes on to quote Warner Crocker, Artistic Director of Absolute Theatre: “That they can set up shop, go into production, and garner an audience in a relatively short time is remarkable in itself and peculiar to Chicago.”<sup>1063</sup>

There are several reasons for this: affordability, accessibility, and security. Chicago is a livable city compared to New York and Los Angeles. It is also possible to produce your own work for very little money. If the play is not a success, the consequences are usually not enough to end a career. While the theatre scene is accessible to newcomers, the city itself is accessible: most of the Midwest lies within a day’s drive of Chicago. The city is much easier to reach and far less intimidating to lifelong Midwesterners than either New York or Los Angeles. Another reason for college friends to form ensembles is their own insecurity: intense friendships are often formed in college, and classmates are usually trained to work in a similar way; therefore, it is safer and easier to continue to work with familiar people after college. Additionally, theatre graduates realize that they are embarking on a career in which their chances of working are very small, and banding together with like-minded friends and staging your own work is a way to increase the odds of success. Lastly, Chicago is a destination for recent graduates because many Midwestern university theatre programs endorse the idea by staging senior showcase productions in the city and inviting agents and casting directors.

Significantly, the Steppenwolf ensemble began in suburban Highland Park rather than within the city – a fact that is often forgotten or overlooked. Gary Sinise and Jeff Perry grew up

---

<sup>1062</sup> Wood, Deborah L. “All the North Side’s a Stage.” *Chicago Tribune* (1963 – Current file) June 6, 1984: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 18 June 2015.

<sup>1063</sup> Wood 82.

in Highland Park, and their connections in the community helped the company obtain affordable space in a local church and borrow lighting equipment and scenery from their former high school. Highland Park is an affluent community, more than capable of supporting a local theatre company, and Steppenwolf had little competition in this field. Some in the ensemble seem to have regarded their time in Highland Park as a kind of exile, but have since come to see it as having helped them to develop:

Being away from the city and being relatively isolated there in the “burbs,” I always thought that was very important, vital for the group to find its own character. In a sense, we kind of fed off that isolation a bit, in a way we were free of other theatrical influence which rather forced us to figure out what we wanted to do.<sup>1064</sup>

Steppenwolf had four years to develop and grow in the relative safety and security of Highland Park before taking on the challenge of making a permanent home in the city. This is one way in which the company does not conform to the Scenario, but is also perhaps a reason that the group became so cohesive as an ensemble.

While the idea of shared collegiate roots is an important part of the Scenario, of equal significance is the notion of ensemble. The ensemble becomes a support system and surrogate family. Laurie Metcalf of Steppenwolf credited the support of the company with giving her the confidence to pursue acting: “Looking back, I don’t think I’d be in theatre now if I hadn’t joined them. I would have been too shy to have done it on my own. I’d probably be a secretary in St.

---

<sup>1064</sup> Jeff Perry, qtd. In Mayer 60.



Louis.”<sup>1065</sup> As part of an ensemble, members potentially have greater artistic input, and are often guaranteed work. In addition, casting within the company can create opportunities for actors to play roles they would not normally be considered for: a prime example being the handsome Gary Cole playing the aged, sickly Howard Hughes-based lead character in Sam Shepherd’s *Seduced* at Remains Theatre in 1980. Cole was in his mid-twenties at the time.<sup>1066</sup>

The Steppenwolf Scenario evolved based on history, and by the late 1970s, there was already a history of success for ensemble-based theatres. The Organic Theatre began as “part theatre company, part commune.”<sup>1067</sup> Victory Gardens and St. Nicholas were artists’ collectives. The legacy of Chicago’s position as the birthplace of improvisational comedy is also important. Improv is built on listening to your scene partner, and building a scene through consensus and agreement; it promotes ensemble performance and reinforces the importance of the group over the individual, with the ideal being “. . . the entire troupe working intuitively together toward the same goal.”<sup>1068</sup> Through improv training, Chicago actors are educated to create as part of a group and to value the ensemble over the individual.

The relative affordability of potential theatre space is one of the things that draws recent graduates to Chicago; it is possible for a theatre ensemble to pool their resources and rent a space to call their own. This generally means a storefront building in a somewhat seedy area of the city. The Off-Loop scene was founded on an aesthetic of converted space, dating back to Body Politic and Kingston Mines.<sup>1069</sup> St. Nicholas Theatre’s space was a former bakery;

---

<sup>1065</sup> Terry, “Steppin’ Out....” 36.

<sup>1066</sup> Gray 326.

<sup>1067</sup> Gray 144.

<sup>1068</sup> Seham, Amy E. *Whose Improv Is It Anyway?: Beyond Second City*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2001. Print. xxv.

<sup>1069</sup> Gray 122.

Victory Gardens first location had been built as a Swedish social club; Wisdom Bridge had been a karate studio, Chinese restaurant, whorehouse, bar, and occult bookstore at various times. In 1981, the Organic converted a space that had once been a movie theatre, film soundstage, and the headquarters of a motorcycle gang.<sup>1070</sup> The converted storefront space became a standard.

Steppenwolf eventually moved to a permanent space in Chicago in 1980, which had been their plan all along. Their first Chicago home was the Jane Addams Hull-House Theatre already an established venue for Off-Loop theatre at that time.<sup>1071</sup> In 1983, they moved into the former St. Nicholas space; again, an established venue and one that did not require extensive renovation. By taking over existing space rather than converting their own (after their initial church basement in Highland Park), Steppenwolf avoided the debt and dissent that has brought about the end of numerous Chicago theatre companies trying to create a theatre out of a storefront. In 1991, Steppenwolf moved into an \$8.5 million custom-built facility, made possible by an aggressive fundraising campaign intended to keep Chicago's most successful theatre company in town.<sup>1072</sup>

The limitations of converted storefront spaces and small budgets dictated the type of work produced. Scenery and lighting are often limited as much by space as by budget. What works well in an intimate space are plays with few characters and plots driven by emotional intensity and interpersonal conflict. The Steppenwolf Scenario implies a particular acting style and approach to play production, as well as a particular type of play, which has become known

---

<sup>1070</sup> Gray 168, 192, 239, 258.

<sup>1071</sup> Gray 302.

<sup>1072</sup> Coe, Robert. "Steppenwolf Howls Again." *American Theatre*, May 1996: 12. EBSCOhost. Web. 25 May 2018. 21.

as the “Chicago Style.” Robert Falls described it as “big-shouldered theatre. At its best, it’s a very muscular, fuck-it-all kind of thing. It’s not polite. It has rough edges. It’s not polished. But there’s a tremendous energy to it.”<sup>1073</sup> Fosdick found that “Chicago Style” theatre usually “referred to a physically demonstrative form of acting that found its fullest expression in highly naturalistic plays performed in intimate venues.”<sup>1074</sup>

This style is heavily identified with Steppenwolf, but the group’s focus on realistic plays and realistic acting, the “Chicago Style,” was not their innovation: this type of work was already being seen on the stages of St. Nicholas, Body Politic, the Organic, Goodman Theatre’s Stage 2, and Victory Gardens prior to Steppenwolf’s emergence. Steppenwolf brought it to national attention with their string of New York transfers in the early 1980s, and consequently received credit for inventing something that was already widespread in Chicago. In the *New York Times* review of 1985’s *Orphans*, Mel Gussow wrote:

Watching that scene, and *Orphans* itself, one is aware of a definitive Steppenwolf style of performance, a style that is earthy, kinetic and instinctive – and exactly suited to the play. It is the opposite of what is commonly regarded as the essence of British acting in what the English refer to as “cup and saucer drama,” those 19<sup>th</sup>-century plays in which china is delicately tinkled in a salon. In the Steppenwolf plays, the crockery is cracked – as in a Julian Schnabel assemblage. Someone has been bashing it around the room. Beer, not tea or

---

<sup>1073</sup> Zehme 54.

<sup>1074</sup> Fosdick 115.

champagne, is the beverage of choice, and it is drunk straight from the can.<sup>1075</sup>

Critical favor is a key part of the Steppenwolf Scenario: without positive reviews to generate public interest, a theatre company will not survive long. Steppenwolf was fortunate in that critic Richard Christiansen became an early and enthusiastic champion of the company. Fosdick's study finds that Christiansen exerted the most influence over Chicago theatre in this era; he generally liked raw, realistic, and emotional productions, and was less enthusiastic about non-realistic and experimental work.<sup>1076</sup> As Fosdick shows, realism came to dominate Chicago theatre as a result. A positive review from Christiansen could generate sold out houses, so it is reasonable to assume that many ensembles came to favor realistic, contemporary dramas over experimental work.

Christiansen's impact on play selection is easy to see: the early Off-Loop theatre work tended to be experimental and avant-garde. In the mid-70s David Mamet, St. Nicholas, and Steppenwolf came to prominence, and Off-Loop theatre came to be characterized by contemporary, realistic plays performed in an aggressive, emotional style, in keeping with Christiansen's aesthetic preferences. In the '70s and '80s, the Off-Loop scene produced few notable productions of Shakespeare, but many of Sam Shepherd's work. This began to alter in the '90s with the success of Chicago Shakespeare, the work of director Mary Zimmerman and Lookingglass Theatre, and the spectacles of Red Moon. The repertoire of what is "Chicago Theatre" has expanded dramatically, but for much of the '70s and '80s, it was based in contemporary realism.

---

<sup>1075</sup> Gussow, Mel. "Orphans is a Study in the Steppenwolf Style." *New York Times* May 19, 1985: H7. ProQuest. Web. 15 Nov. 2010.

<sup>1076</sup> Fosdick 118.

According to the Scenario, critical favor should lead to financial success and institutional stability. Financial success is relative, however; many theatre artists consider a production that covers its costs at the box office to be successful. A more relevant goal is institutional stability for the theatre company. The best definition of this for an Off-Loop theatre comes from Terry McCabe, the artistic director of Stormfield Theatre in the 1980s. McCabe defined institutional stability as having a permanent space, Equity status, producing a four or five-show season, a subscription-based audience, and employing a full-time administrative staff.<sup>1077</sup> Ironically, he offered this definition in the 1988 press release announcing the closure of his company; using the occasion to draw attention to the problems facing small theatre companies at the time. He noted that theatres founded in the early to mid-70s, such as Body Politic, the Organic, Victory Gardens, St. Nicholas and Wisdom Bridge, grew into institutions within five to seven years of their founding. McCabe observed that “No Chicago theatre founded in the 1980s has been able to make the complete jump to that status.”<sup>1078</sup> Stormfield had followed many of the tenets of the Steppenwolf Scenario and had a great deal of critical success, but was never able to become institutionally stable.

They were not alone in this: inspired by the success of the companies founded in the 1970s, the ‘80s saw the creation of perhaps a hundred more theatres. McCabe noted:

. . . there has been created a large, permanent underclass of tiny little theatres that will always be tiny little theatres. Stormfield’s one of them. It’s relatively easy to start a theatre here, and to keep it going indefinitely on a

---

<sup>1077</sup> McCabe, Terry. “Stormfield Theatre Calls It A Day.” Press Release. 25 Jan 1988. Stormfield Theatre Archive, Harold Washington Library Special Collections.

<sup>1078</sup> McCabe, “Stormfield Calls It A Day.”

shoestring budget. ( . . . ) But long-term growth and stability are the only managerial goals that count, and it is precisely these things that have been crowded out for the small theatres by our own sheer numbers.<sup>1079</sup>

McCabe's press release highlights some benefits enjoyed by the early Off-Loop theatre companies which were not available to later groups. One was novelty: Off-Loop theatre was new and there was little competition in the 1970s. Another was demographic: a young and growing audience. In 1971, the Organic took an audience survey and found that sixty percent of their audience was between fifteen and twenty-five years old, and another thirty percent were between twenty-five and forty.<sup>1080</sup> Chicago's baby boomers discovering live theatre helped to create the Off-Loop theatre scene; subsequent generations have not been as large, and have not been as enthusiastic about theatre. Finally, the first generation of Off-Loop companies received CETA funding, which helped them grow into institutions. CETA funding ended in the early 1980s.<sup>1081</sup> While Stormfield's closure may seem to call into question the efficacy of the Steppenwolf Scenario, McCabe's response validates its existence: the press release speaks to frustration with the disparity between the myth and the reality of the Off-Loop theatre scene at the time, but confirms the existence of the Scenario itself.

In the early 1980s, Chicago's Off-Loop theatre began to attract national attention: David Mamet's *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *American Buffalo* won Obie awards in 1976; *Glengarry Glen Ross* won a Pulitzer in 1984; Gregory Mosher had left the Goodman to be artistic director at Lincoln Center; actors Joe Mantegna and William J. Peterson had already

---

<sup>1079</sup> McCabe, "Stormfield Calls It A Day."

<sup>1080</sup> Gray 153.

<sup>1081</sup> Gray 28.

become famous. Steppenwolf took *True West* to New York, followed by several other shows. Wisdom Bridge and Steppenwolf were invited to perform at Peter Sellars' American National Theater in Washington, DC. Beyond theatre critics, the national press began to notice, and celebratory articles about Chicago theatre appeared in mainstream publications like *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Christian Science Monitor* and *Vanity Fair*. As Chicago artists were receiving national recognition, they were also leaving town. At the time, it was expected that once a Chicago actor or director had "made it" in New York or Los Angeles, they would – in fact, had to – leave Chicago to further their career.

In 1984, it was widely expected that Steppenwolf would be following the well-worn path of Mamet, Mantegna, Mosher, and others who had left Chicago for bigger fields. Following *True West* and *Balm In Gilead*, Steppenwolf transferred their productions of *And A Nightingale Sang* to New York in 1984, and *Orphans* in 1985. John Malkovich was the first ensemble member to "break out" - playing Biff in *Death of a Salesman* on Broadway – but ten of the fifteen then-current Steppenwolf ensemble members were also working outside of Chicago at that time. Up to this point, the Scenario had been that when one achieved the level of success that Steppenwolf was approaching, it was time to leave Chicago. Instead, in 1984 the company held a press conference and pointedly announced that they would be remaining in Chicago. In reaffirming their commitment to the city and following through on it, Steppenwolf wrote a new ending for the Scenario, and validated the entire Chicago theatre scene.

Members of the Steppenwolf ensemble are widely perceived within the Chicago theatre community to have earned their success through hard work and dedication, two key elements of the habitus of Off-Loop theatre. In the opening chapter, I mentioned that this study was

inspired by hearing the stories of my friend, actor Larry Russo. His thoughts on the subject say all there is to say about how the company is regarded in Chicago:

Of course they went big time, they did it by hard work. They were good people. They worked hard, paid attention to their craft. Of all the theatre companies I know, including the Group Theatre, they've kept it together. They're a phenomenon, it all came together – the playwrights, acting company, artistic choices, the way they've grown. I think it's a phenomenal story. To say they've put this city on the map is an understatement. [ . . . ] Steppenwolf's success benefitted all of the other theatres. They made the cultural climate grow – they made it possible for others to succeed. It grew the audience, drew them into seeing stuff that not everybody saw. They challenged the audience, brought them along for the ride. They built up a great audience base and made it possible for little theatre companies to do their thing.<sup>1082</sup>

The Steppenwolf ensemble were not the first group of friends from college to start a theatre, or perform in a church basement. They had talent, they worked hard, and they persevered - all admired qualities in Chicago theatre. Significantly, they became a favorite of critic Richard Christiansen, and – in many cases - simply had good luck. The company did most of the things that other theatre groups of their time did, and they achieved an unprecedented level of success. By the early 1980s, they had exceeded what St. Nicholas had achieved. What *is* significant is that Steppenwolf chose to stay when they could have left the city, and in doing so, created a new ending for the Scenario. In that moment, the story of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre

---

<sup>1082</sup> Russo, Larry. Telephone interview. 9 Dec. 2010.



became their story, for better or worse. Steppenwolf declared Chicago a center for theatre, not a periphery. They added to the repertoire the possibility that one could have a film and television career *and* maintain an artistic home - that one could remain connected to community and ensemble in Chicago. In that moment, Steppenwolf came to embody the habitus of Chicago's Off-Loop theatre scene, and the Steppenwolf Scenario was complete.

Steppenwolf's success inspires others to try, and the theatre community in Chicago continues to grow as a result. The Scenario keeps a steady stream of young actors and theatre artists coming to town after college, hoping to become "The Next Steppenwolf," and this steady replenishment of theatre talent keeps the theatre community in Chicago vital. New companies, new artists, and new work continually arrive and develop. That the Steppenwolf Scenario seems to work, at least for some, ensures that it remains in place.<sup>1083</sup> The ensemble did not originate the Scenario that bears their name: but they did refine and popularize it to the point where it has become their own story. And by succeeding, they wrote the ending. As is often said of actors in a play, "they made it their own."

## **Conclusion**

I began this project with the intention to write about Off-Loop theatre as a community. Long before graduate school, when I was living and working in the Off-Loop theatre scene, I saw how what I am now calling the Steppenwolf Scenario worked - being "the next Steppenwolf" was what motivated "everyone" - even those like myself, who arrived in Chicago with only the

---

<sup>1083</sup> This section is based on material that originally appeared in my thesis. Epplert, Shannon. "The Influence of the Steppenwolf Script on Chicago's Off-Loop Theatre." MA Thesis. Illinois State U, 2011. Print.

vaguest notion of what Steppenwolf was all about. I took my cues from what everyone else did, and I learned as I went along. I internalized the habitus, and practiced accordingly.

Habitus works from within, it “...leaves unsaid all that goes without saying.”<sup>1084</sup> There is no conscious collective effort or leader for it.<sup>1085</sup> What Bourdieu calls *doxa* makes, “. . . the natural and social world appear as being self-evident.”<sup>1086</sup> Understanding and articulating this habitus – getting at what drives Chicago theatre history forward - became my project. The Steppenwolf Scenario was grounded in Diana Taylor’s work, which led to Bourdieu. As I read *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, I made the note, “How the past determines the future – we look to the past and seek to reproduce it.”<sup>1087</sup> This was followed by an outline of my own recognition that Steppenwolf had really been following St. Nicholas’ example, and that there was a pattern connected to Paul Sills, who started Playwrights Theatre Club, then The Compass, then Second City, then tried to revive Playwrights at Second City, then Story Theatre, then Body Politic. My note ends with:

Sills also very publicly announced he would “stay” in Chicago – setting a precedent for Steppenwolf later on. (. . . ) Steppenwolf was very likely not fully aware of what Sills had done earlier, but somehow they managed to replay it, speaking to the point that habitus works without orchestration or consciousness.<sup>1088</sup>

---

<sup>1084</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 18.

<sup>1085</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 72.

<sup>1086</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 164.

<sup>1087</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 72.

<sup>1088</sup> This refers to Paul Sills’ “Letter from Chicago” that appeared in *Yale/theatre* in 1968, in which he turned down a job offer at Yale to return to Chicago and start Body Politic. Sills left Chicago in 1970 to do Story Theatre in Los Angeles and never returned - that was Paul Sills for you.

I began to see that what predated the Off-Loop scene was crucial to its formation. The ghosts and images from the past mattered, even when we weren't aware of them.

As I researched the “prehistory” of Off-Loop theatre, I found more connections, leading back to the 1890s. I came to see that the dispositions which created the habitus had deep roots, and that these dispositions are what came together in 1969 and allowed something new to happen. The resulting theatre scene in turn gave rise to its own mythology: the Steppenwolf Scenario, which helped to perpetuate the scene itself. This is the history of a theatre community spinning itself into existence over time, and creating a story to ensure its future.

My interest in Chicago theatre is based in the fact that I feel a part of it, but my interest in this overall *approach* to history and habitus runs deeper. I am Anishinaabe, a member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians.<sup>1089</sup> This is another part of my identity, another community that I belong to with its own culture and its own habitus. It is rare that one identity intersects with the other, but perhaps in this instance it does. In “white” culture, there are four directions - four points on the compass: north, south, east and west. In Ojibwe culture, there are seven: north, south, east, west - but it is often thought of as left, right, before us, behind us, above us, below us, and center – the heart. In Anishinaabe art and pictographs, the heart is always rendered – a red dot in the chest of a figure: it is both our center and our spirit. The sense of direction relates to the way Anishinaabe think of time: the past, the present, and the future are always with us now – again, it is the heart. Time and space intersect within our beings, at our core. So the past is *always* present, and today matters far into the future. For me,

---

<sup>1089</sup> The terms *Anishinaabe*, *Chippewa*, and *Ojibwe* mean the same. *Ojibwe* is the French and *Chippewa* the English rendering of another tribe's name for our people. *Anishinaabe* is what we call ourselves in our language. The terms are used interchangeably, even by Anishinaabe people.

this research into the history of non-commercial, alternative theatre efforts in Chicago is the story of our ancestors, and we honor them by knowing about them. The articulation of habitus is about understanding how that past - those ancestors - have constructed our present, and the Steppenwolf Scenario is a way in which we speak to the future. And it is in my heart.

I have come to see Off-Loop theatre as akin to a weed growing up through a sidewalk crack: no one really planted it there, it was not something that grew according to a plan, it resisted efforts to contain it; yet it survived and thrived because it was native, organic, and deeply rooted. Understanding why Chicago's theatre culture works the way it does is important for understanding how influential it has subsequently become in American culture: Off-Loop theatre is an incubator for young talent, a laboratory for new work, and a crucible for larger issues.<sup>1090</sup> With Steppenwolf's success, Chicago's theatre scene went from being a stepping stone to something greater, to an end unto itself; from periphery to center. That Chicago seems to need this sort of civic validation is also a symptom of the "Second City" syndrome: Chicago needs to tell itself that what happens on its stages and in its theatres matters; to value it and to preserve it.

### **Future Research**

My initial idea of a grounded theory study of how the Steppenwolf Scenario has functioned over time within the Chicago theatre scene is worth pursuing. I would like to focus on some of the lesser-known and shorter-lived theatre companies, in order to present a clearer picture of how the theatre scene functioned as a community. In my archival research, I found more material on Donald Robertson and Alice Gerstenberg than I had reason to include here.

---

<sup>1090</sup> As an example, the #NotInOurHouse movement predates the #MeToo movement by over a year.

Robertson is simply an interesting and colorful figure, with a career that begins in the commercial theatre and ends in the uplift movement, and spans two continents; his archive is extensive, but he has received little scholarly attention. Alice Gerstenberg wrote an unpublished autobiography which is held at the Chicago History Museum, while the rest of her papers are at the Newberry Library. Due to time constraints, I was unable to read her autobiography; a future project would be to incorporate her own words into a more complete look at her life and career.

Chicago's art theatre scene is deserving of its own history, as this was a dynamic and diverse art world on its own terms. I have been struck by the prevalence and influence that women have had within Chicago's theatre history: from Anna Morgan, to Alice Gerstenberg, Ellen Van Volkenburg, Mary Aldis, Laura Dainty Pelham, Shirley Graham of the Federal Theatre Project, Viola Spolin, Minnie Galatzer, to June Pyskacek. The story of women as makers of Chicago theatre has yet to be told, and I feel needs to be.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Works Cited

- #NotInOurHouse, A Chicago Theatre Community*. 25 May 2018. [www.notinourhouse.org](http://www.notinourhouse.org).
- "25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Program, Uptown Players" *Alice Gerstenberg Papers (1903 – 1971)*. Newberry Library, Chicago.
- "\$3,000,000 For Nation's Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Nov 09 1905: 5. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018.
- "398,894 In WPA Grants to State Freed by M'Carl." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 18, 1935: 23. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- "6,000 Memberships for Civic Theater Society Are Reported." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 21, 1924: 25. *ProQuest*. Web. 7 Dec. 2013.
- A Program for the Arts in Chicago*. Chicago: Mayor's Committee for Economic and Cultural Development, 1966. Print.
- "A Theatrical Autopsy." *The Dial (1880-1929)* Mar. 1, 1907: 129 - 131. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 Jan 2017.
- "About Alice's Stage Mother." *New York Times (1857-1922)* Apr. 4, 1915: X5. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "A.C.T. Plan Pleases Committee." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Sept. 13, 1966: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec 2017.
- "Acting School at Goodman." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Aug. 3, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- Addams, Jane and Todd London. "How America's First Art Theatre Came to Be." *American Theatre*, Jan. 2006: 80 – 88. Print.
- Aldis, Arthur T. "Adventuring in the Drama." *The Drama*, Feb. 1917. Print.
- "All Legitimate Theaters to be Dark Tonight." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 31, 1938: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- America Hurrah* Program. Chicago City Players file. Chicago Theatre Archives. Harold Washington Library Special Collections, Chicago, IL. 8 July 2017.
- "Amusements." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Mar 22, 1895: 8. *ProQuest*. Web 18 May 2018.
- "Amusement Notes." *New York Times (1857-1922)* Jul 19 1887: 4. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018.

- Arnsberger, Paul, et al. "A History of the Tax-Exempt Sector: An SOI Perspective." *Statistics of Income (SOI) Bulletin*. 27.3 (2008): 105-135. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Art Theater Players to Appear in Winnetka." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 10, 1926: 33. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- Arthur, Sears H. "Satirical Show Hits New Deal: Chicago-Bound." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 25, 1935: 13. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- "Article 3 -- No Title." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Apr. 21, 1912: 13. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Arts Program Critics Lashed." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 27, 1966: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.
- "Ask Volunteers for Wholesale Price Tag Plan: Clyne Declares Honest Merchants Can Drive Prices Down." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec. 21, 1919: A6. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "At the Little and Experimental Theatres 1918." *Theatre Arts* Dec. 1917: 56. Print.
- "At the Little and Experimental Theatres, 1918." *Theatre Arts* Dec. 1917: 60. Print.
- "At the Little and Experimental Theatres." *Theatre Arts* Feb. 1918: 111. Print.
- "At the Little Theatres." *Theatre Arts* Aug. 1917: 199. Print.
- Barker, Jeff A. "Paul Sills' Life in the Theatre: The First Half Century (1927-1979)." MA Thesis. Northern Illinois U, 1981. Print.
- Becker, Howard Saul. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: U of California Press, 2008. Print.
- "'Beethoven' at New Theatre." *New York Times (1857-1922)* Mar. 15, 1910: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.
- Berkowitz, Gerald M. *New Broadways: Theatre Across America, 1950-1980*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982. Print.
- Billington, Michael. "Off Broadway." *The Guardian (UK)*, 23 June 2004: n. pag. theguardian.com. Web. 1 June 2014.
- "Billy Bryant Gives Chicago Showboat Acting of 'Hamlet'." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 6, 1932: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.
- Bottoms, Stephen J. *Playing Underground: A Critical History Of The 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 2004. Print.
- Blood, Melanie N. "Ideology and Theatre at Hull-House Under Jane Addams." *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 5.2 (1993): 71. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018.

- . "Theatre in Settlement Houses: Hull-House Players, Neighborhood Playhouse, and Karamu Theatre." *Theatre History Studies* 16 (1996): 45. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018.
- Boehm, Lisa Beth Krissoff. *Popular Culture and the Enduring Myth of Chicago, 1871 – 1968*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- "Bomb Explosion Will Modernize Chicago Drama." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Sept. 23, 1945: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.
- Browne, Maurice. "Temple of a Living Art, a Plea for an American Art Theatre." *Drama* 12 (1911): 160-178. Print.
- . "The Hull-House Players in 'Justice.'" *The Theatre Magazine*, Sept. 1911: 89-90. Print.
- . *Too Late to Lament: An Autobiography*. London: Gollancz, 1955. Print.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Loïc J.D. Wacquant. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1992. Print.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Randal Johnson. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia UP, 1993. Print.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977. Print.
- . *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990. Print.
- Brandt, Nat. *Chicago Death Trap: The Iroquois Theatre Fire of 1903*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2003. Print.
- Brown, Les. "Legitimate: Do-it-Yourself Trend in Chi Legit; Windy City Intelligentsia 'Starved' for Plays Not Blatantly Slick." *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)* Nov. 5, 1958: 71, 76. *ProQuest*. Web. 19 Jan. 2017.
- Bukowski, Doug. "City Spurns Its Old Symbols: Has 'I Will' Become 'I Want?'" *Chicago Tribune* Nov 09 1999: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 4 June 2018.
- Butler, Sheppard. "Here and There in the Theaters." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec. 15, 1921: 19. *ProQuest*. Web. 19 July 2016.
- . "That \$100,000,000 Merger; Curtain Time at the Play." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 21, 1923: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 July 2016.
- By, Duncan A. "Chicago's Hull House Copes with Modern Social Problems." *The Washington Post (1923-1954)* Oct. 13, 1935: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- Campbell, Hugh Stuart. "News of the Society World." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Nov. 29, 1908: G8. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.



- . "News of the Society World." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Nov 8, 1908: F6. *ProQuest*. Web. 18 May 2018.
- "Cantor to Take Lead Role in 'Jazz Singer.'" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Feb. 11, 1954: N2. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Capturing Chicago Theater: 35 Years of Theater Photography by Lisa Howe-Ebright (1974-2009)." Harold Washington Library Center, May – October, 2010.
- Cass, Judith. "Dancing Party Set for May 29 at Shoreacres." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 13, 1936: 25. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.
- . "Wooded Trails Lure Guests at Virginia Resort." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 7, 1942: 23. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.
- . "Elizabeth Dunne to be Bride of Sgt. McCauley Tomorrow." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 16, 1944: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.
- . "Girls in Lead as More Births are Announced." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 20, 1943: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.
- . "Society Turns Out for Two Charity Events." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 8, 1932: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.
- . "Theater Series for Youngsters Proves Popular." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 6, 1943: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.:
- . "War Time Brings Cancellation of Traditional Class Reunions." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 26, 1943: 21. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.
- . ""When Chicago was Young" Opens Tonight, Benefits Olivet." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 7, 1932: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- Cassidy, Claudia. "Goodman Theater Spring Nightmare Instead of 'Dream.'" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923 – 1963)* May 9, 1958: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- . "On the Aisle." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Apr. 8, 1962: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- . "On the Aisle." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 13, 1957: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- . "On the Aisle." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923 – 1963)* May 2, 1955: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- . "On the Aisle." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 25, 1962: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- . "On the Aisle: Actors Company Stages 'Home of the Brave.'" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 6, 1947. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- . "On the Aisle: Burgess Meredith to Reopen Edgewater Playhouse July 8 in 'The Circus of Dr. Lao.'" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 8, 1947: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

- Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923 – 1963) June 3, 1957: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- . "On the Aisle: Interesting 'Everyman' in a Glow of Medieval Pageantry." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923 – 1963) Dec. 11, 1957: 13. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- . "On the Aisle: Slapstick Shakespeare, Potboiler Musical, Cynical...." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Nov. 27, 1960: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- C, C. "The Stage." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Jan. 1, 1931: 35. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.
- . "The Stage 1-12-31." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Jan. 12, 1931: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.
- "Change in Municipal Code: Daley Boost to Theaters." *Chicago Tribune* (1963-Current file) May 23, 1973: B1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 May 2018.
- Chansky, Dorothy. "Alice Gerstenberg and the 'Experimental Trap'." *Midwestern Miscellany* 30. (2002): 21-34. Print.
- . *Composing Ourselves: the Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004. Print.
- "Charlotte Carr Resigns as Head of Hull House." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) Dec. 24, 1942: 12. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- "Charlotte Carr Will Head Hull House on Oct. 1." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) July 16, 1937: 20. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- "Chi Actors' Group, 75-100G Backed to Try Pro Pose." *Variety* (Archive: 1905-2000) Aug. 17, 1946: 42. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Chicago Amateur Group Eyes Pro Set-Up; Seeks Angel With 10G for Reshuffle." *Variety* (Archive: 1905-2000) Sept. 11, 1943: 24. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Chicago Elocutionists: Teachers Who Give the Young Idea the Proper Trend." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922) Aug 14, 1887: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 18 May 2018.
- Chicago Woman's Club. *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club for the First Forty Years of Its Organization, 1876-1916*. Chicago: Chicago Woman's Club, 1916.
- Christiansen, Richard. *A Theatre of Our Own: A History and a Memoir of 1,001 Nights in Chicago*. Evanston: Northwestern UP. 2004. Print.
- . "Intense Acting, Bates Script Give Production of 'The Island' its Power." *Chicago Tribune* (1963-Current file) Apr. 9, 1992: 24. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.
- . "Play by Play, Minor Leaguers Rise to the Majors." *Chicago Tribune* (1963 – Current file) Dec. 9, 1984: K5. *ProQuest*. Web. 15 Nov 2010.

- . "Spirited Troupe Successfully Clears Hurdles of Indecision." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Mar. 2, 1980: E8. *ProQuest*. Web. 14 Nov. 2010.
- . "Success Won't Break Up the Gang, Steppenwolf Says." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* July 3, 1984: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 May 2018.
- . "Tempo Entertainment: Key 'B Flat' actors not in concert with concept." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Sept. 20, 1978: 5. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.
- . "Tempo Theater: 'Rescue on Avenue B' catches mood of Beat '50s.'" *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Mar. 20, 1979: 5. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.
- Cinderella. "Society and Entertainments." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* June 28, 1918: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 June 2016.
- Clifford, Terry. "Jack Wallace: Off the Ropes and into the Footlights." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Feb. 6, 1977: 5. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- Coe, Robert. "Steppenwolf Howls Again." *American Theatre*, May 1996: 12. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- Cohen, Adam and Elizabeth Taylor. *American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard J. Daley: His Battle for Chicago and the Nation*. Boston: Little, Brown, 2000. Print.
- "Col. M'Cormick Hits New Deal at Philadelphia." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 18, 1935: 8. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- Colander, Pat. "Chicago Theater Comes into its Own." *New York Times (1923-Current file)*: 2. 27 May 1984. *ProQuest*. Web. 29 Dec. 2017.
- . "People: From the 'Circus' to the High-wire World of Theater." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Dec. 12, 1975: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.
- Coleman, Janet. *The Compass*. New York: Knopf: 1990. Print.
- Collins, Charles. "Art Theater Troupe Opens Late in April." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 26, 1935: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- . "Drama Depicts Family Life of Chicago Negro." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Apr. 8, 1938: 16. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- . "Events on the Stage." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 7, 1933: 19. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.
- . "Great Northern Theater Reopens with WPA Musical show." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 29, 1936: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

- . "Play Touches High Spots of City's History." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923 – 1963)* Dec. 27, 1937: 8. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.
- . "Premiere with Extra Thrills at the Goodman." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Apr. 5, 1931: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- . "Syphilis Story Well Told in a Good Drama." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Apr. 30, 1938: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- . "Trustees Laud, End shows on Goodman Stage." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 1, 1931: 33. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- Currey, Margery. "Schools to Back Real Community Theater Here." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Oct. 21, 1917: A7. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 June 2016.
- "Curtain Calls." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Dec. 17, 1970: 4. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.
- Czechowski, Jan Charles. "Art and Commerce: Chicago Theatre 1900 – 1920." Diss. U of Michigan, 1982. Ann Arbor: *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018. Print.
- De Young, Ruth. "Arts Club Play about Nudists Brings Laughs." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 2, 1934: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.
- Dettmer, Roger. "Theater: Finally, the Goodman Fulfills an 18-Year-Old Promise." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* May 18, 1975: 4. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- Dickinson, Thomas H. *The Insurgent Theatre*. New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1917. Print.
- "Disciples of Delsarte: The Modjeskas and Bernhardtts of the Future." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb. 19, 1888: 25. *ProQuest*. Web. 18 May 2018.
- "Display Ad 4 -- no Title." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec 20 1904: 5. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018.
- "Display Ad 6 -- No Title." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Mar. 27, 1915: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Display Ad 11 – No title." *Chicago Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Mar. 15, 1913: 12. *ProQuest*. Web 28 June 2016.
- "Display Ad 35 -- No Title." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb. 25, 1912: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 Jan. 2017.
- "Display Ad 38 -- No Title." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Sept. 5, 1943: E2. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Display Ad 151 -- No Title." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Apr. 7, 1946: D5. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

"Doubt Muddies Plans for WPA Play's Opening." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 11, 1936: 18. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

"Drama Notes." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Sept. 24, 1944: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.

"Drama Players End Season." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Apr. 14, 1912: 3. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.

"Drama School Takes Space in Loop Building." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 16, 1947: SWB. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

Dryden, Wilma June. "Chicago Theatre as Reflected in the Newspapers 1900 – 1904." Diss. U of Illinois, 1961. Print.

Duffey, Bernard. *The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters*. E. Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1954. Print.

Duis, Perry R. "Where Is Athens Now?": The Fine Arts Building 1898 to 1918." *Chicago History* 6.2 (1977): 66-78. Print.

Dukore, Bernard. "Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre." Diss. U of Illinois, 1957. Print.

E. B. "The Drama and its Devotees." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Jun 23, 1895: 36. *ProQuest*. Web. 18 May 2018.

Edwards, Willard. "Jolt Roosevelt; Curb WPA." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 17, 1939: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

Epplert, Shannon. "The Influence of the Steppenwolf Script on Chicago's Off-Loop Theatre." MA Thesis. Illinois State U, 2011. Print.

Favoino, Gabriel. "Chicago Next." *Chicago Magazine* 1964; 92–94. Print.

F. D. "Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 6, 1927: 33. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.

---. "Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Feb. 10, 1926: 27. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

---. "Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 8, 1929: 41. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

"Federal Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 27, 1935: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

Feldman, Lee G. "A Brief History of Improvisational Theatre in the United States." *Yale/theater* 5.2 (1974): 128 – 151. Print.

"First Night Luxuries." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 16, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.

"First Production of Playwrights to be Staged Sunday." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Apr. 4, 1922:

23. ProQuest. Web. 19 July 2016.
- Fitch, Robert. *The Assassination of New York*. London: Verso, 1993. Print.
- Fosdick, Scott. "Newspaper Critic Shapes Chicago Style of Theater." *Newspaper Research Journal* 23.2/3 2002: 114+. EBSCOhost. Web. 14 Nov. 2010.
- "Four Are Named to Direct Arts Relief Program." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 27, 1935: 10. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.
- Gerstenberg, Alice. "Letter to Diana Haskell." *Alice Gerstenberg Papers (1903 – 1971)*. Newberry Library, Chicago.
- . "The Players' Workshop of Chicago." *The Theatre Magazine* Sept 1917: 142. Print.
- Giddens, Eugene. "The Sad Shepherd: Textual Essay." *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*. Bevington, David M., and Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson, eds.. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. Print.
- "Give College Girl's Plays: Bryn Mawr Graduates Present Miss...." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Mar. 13, 1908: 3. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Given the Name 'High Bohemia': Great Interest in Miss Anna Morgan's Studio Teas." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb 16, 1896: 12. ProQuest. Web. 18 May 2018.
- Gleason, Catherine H. *Mapping the Lincoln Park Nexus: The Origin of the Chicago Off-Loop Theatre Movement*. Diss. U of Wisconsin-Madison, 2010. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2011.
- Goodman, Kenneth Sawyer. "Drama – the Chicago Theatre Society." *The Nation* 19 Mar. 1914: 308-9. Print.
- Gray, Stephen C. *A History of the Chicago Off-Loop Theatre Explosion: 1969 – 1989*. Diss. Ohio State U, 1997. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1999. Print.
- Greene, Alexander. "The Goodman Argument." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 8, 1930: 1. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.
- "Group Opens Season with 'Crucible.'" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 19, 1958: B9. ProQuest. Web. 22 May 2018.
- Guernsey, Jr., Otis L. "Victory Belles." *New York Herald Tribune (1926-1962)* Oct. 27, 1943: 18A. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.
- Gussow, Mel. "Orphans is a Study in the Steppenwolf Style." *New York Times* May 19, 1985: H7. ProQuest. Web. 15 Nov. 2010.
- . "Stage: Shepard's 'West' Revived and Restored." *New York Times* Oct. 18, 1982: C18. ProQuest. Web. 30 June 2011.

Hammond, Percy. "Arrival of 'Damaged Goods' and Other Events of the Week." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Sept. 28, 1913: B1. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.

---. "'Dolly Reforming Herself' at the Fine Arts Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec. 26, 1913: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.

---. "Music and the Theater: 'Alice in Wonderland' at the Fine Arts." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb. 12, 1915: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

---. "Music and Theatre: 'At the Ball,' Yes – and No." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Dec. 26, 1914: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

---. "News and Views of the Theaters." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Oct. 7, 1917: C1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 June 2016.

---. "News of the Theatres." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Mar. 5, 1914: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.

---. "News of the Theatres." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Oct. 15, 1913: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.

---. "The Theatre Society Surveys Its Season's Repertory Adventures." *Chicago Daily Tribune, (1872 – 1922)* Feb. 22, 1914: G1. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.

"Harper Theater Plays Scheduled." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 5, 1967: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

"Have Won Success on the Amateur Stage: Miss..." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* July 12, 1908: F6. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

Hecht, Stuart Joel. *Hull-House Theatre: An Analytical and Evaluative History*. Diss. Northwestern U, 1983. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 Dec 2017.

---. "Kenneth Sawyer Goodman: Bridging Chicago's Affluent and Artistic Network." *Theatre History Studies* 13 (1993): 135 - 47. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.

---. "The Plays of Alice Gerstenberg: Cultural Hegemony in the American Little Theatre." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 26.1 (1992): 1–16. *Crossref*. Web. 17 Jan 2017.

"Herma Clark Play on Bond Wagon Tomorrow." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 14, 1943: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.

Highlander, James L. "America's First Art Theatre: The New Theatre of Chicago." *Educational Theatre Journal* 11. (1959): 285-290. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.

---. "An Historical Study of the New Theatre and The Robertson Players of Chicago (1906-08)." MA Thesis. U of Illinois: 1951. Print.

"History." The Arts Club of Chicago. <http://www.artclubchicago.org/about/history/>.

Holli, Melvin G. "Political Equilibrium and the Daley Eras in Chicago." *Continuity* 23.1 (1999): 83-96. EBSCOhost. Web. 27 Dec 2017.

Houston, Gary. "A Vital Arrogance." *Resetting The Stage: Theater Beyond The Loop, 1960-1990*. Chicago: Chicago Public Library, 1990. 16 – 22. Print.

---. "Her Plays Create a World Filled with Beauty and Wisdom." *Chicago Sun-Times* Oct. 8, 1972: N. pag. Kingston Mines File. Chicago Theatre Archives. Harold Washington Library Special Collections, Chicago. 8 July 2017.

Hubbard, W. L. "Crowds Hear Mansfield and Argue on His Merits." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* May 13, 1906: 1. ProQuest. Web. 17 May 2018.

---. "Donald Robertson Leading Able Company at Ravinia." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Sep 15, 1907: 1. ProQuest. Web. 17 May 2018.

---. "Mrs. Besant Pleads for Art to Save Nation from Decay." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Sep 22, 1907: 1. ProQuest. Web. 17 May 2018.

---. "Music and the Drama." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* 12 May 1904: 6. ProQuest. Web. 16 May 2018.

---. "Trash Usurping Place of the Drama in Chicago." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Oct. 13 1907: 1. ProQuest. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.

"Hull House Play." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 5, 1935: 19. ProQuest. Web. 22 May 2018.

"Hull House Play." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 9, 1934: 21. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

"In the Theaters." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb. 9, 1908: 1. ProQuest. Web. 9 June 2016.

"Ivan Lazareff of Chicago Art Theater Dies: Director Succumbs to Heart Disease." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 28, 1929: 7. ProQuest. Web. 22 May 2018.

Jackson, Julie. "Not Just Rock 'N' Roll: Chicago Theatre, 1984-1990." *Theatre History Studies* 36 (2017): 75-111. Print.

Jacobi, Peter P. "Culture – Does Anyone Really Care?" *Chicago Magazine* Winter 1965: 62 – 71. Print.

Jaklon, Mildred. "Art Institute Little Theater is Dedicated." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 22, 1925: 19. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.

"Jane Addams of Hull House is Dead." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 22, 1935: 1. ProQuest. Web. 22 May 2018.



- Jenkins, Richard. *Pierre Bourdieu*. New York: Routledge. 1992. Print.
- Jewett, Eleanor. "A New Viewpoint on the Goodman Theater Row." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 6, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- . "Facts Wanted on Goodman Row." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 22, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- . "Goodman Ready for Coming Season." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Aug. 31, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- . "Predicts Brilliant Goodman Future." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 15, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- . "Slants on Goodman Situation." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 13, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- Jones, Chris. "Deaths Are Felt Deeply by Chicago Theater family." *Chicago Tribune*. [www.chicagotribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com). Sept. 7, 2014: n. pag. Web. 25 June 2015.
- "Junior Leaguers Plan Second Play for the Children." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Jan. 21, 1922: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 19 July 2016.
- Kart, Larry. "Theater: 'Hothouse': Roz rewrites the rules." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* May 6, 1977: 6. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.
- "Kenneth Sawyer Goodman." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 19.6 (1925): 66. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 May 2018.
- Kimbrel, Dawn K. *The Aldis Compound*. Lake Forest, IL: Lake Forest Lake Bluff Historical Society, 1994. Print.
- Kinsley, Philip. "Halsted Street is a Prototype of Average Man." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 8, 1931: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- Kirby, E.T. "The Delsarte Method: 3 Frontiers of Actor Training." *The Drama Review: TDR* 16.1 (1972): 55–69. Print.
- Kirkwood, Edith Brown. "News of the Society World: Colonies of City's Younger Set Making New Homes in the West." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Sept. 14, 1913: D2. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Kites, Bikes to Aid '4th' Observance in Lincoln Park." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* June 18, 1967: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- Komiss, Diane. "Chicagoans: Profiles of Theatrical Entrepreneurs, Bob Sickinger." *Chicago Magazine* Summer 1967: 36 – 40. Print.

- "Lake Forest Players Welcomed in Boston." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec. 20, 1913: 15. ProQuest. Web. 28 June 2016.
- Langer, Adam. "The Bay at Nice." *Chicago Reader* Jan. 26, 1995: N. Pag. www.chicagoreader.com. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- "Lasting Federal Aid Stage is Aim of New Dealers." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 31, 1935: 2. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.
- "Laura D. Pelham, Social Worker, Dies: Ill 2 Days." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 23, 1924: 10. ProQuest. Web. 22 May 2018.
- Lazare, Lewis. "Immediate Theatre Returns Promise to its Future." *Crain's Chicago Business* Feb. 15, 1988: 47. ProQuest. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.
- . "The Economic Landscape" *Resetting The Stage: Theater Beyond The Loop, 1960-1990*. Chicago: Chicago Public Library, 1990. 27 - 32. Print.
- League of Chicago Theatres. "About Us." 25 May 2018. www.chicagoplays.com.
- "Lecture Attendance." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 3.1 (1909): 7. JSTOR. Web. 17 May 2018.
- Les. "Legitimate: Stock Review - the Crucible." *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)* Dec. 3, 1958: 90. ProQuest. Web. 22 May 2018.
- Levitt, Aimee and Christopher Piatt, "At Profiles Theatre the Drama – and Abuse – is Real." *Chicago Reader*, www.chicagoreader.com. 8 June 2016: n. pag. Web. 5 May 2018.
- Lewis, Allan. "Review: *Story Theatre, The Revenger's Tragedy*." *Educational Theatre Journal* 23.1 (1971): 83–84. JSTOR. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- Liebling, A. J. *Chicago: The Second City*. New York: Knopf, 1952. Print.
- "Life of Beethoven at New Theatre" *New York Times (1857 – 1922)* Apr. 12, 1910: 11. ProQuest. Web. 17 May 2017.
- "Little Theater at Hull House Oldest in Land." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 5, 1933: 1. ProQuest. Web. 25 May 2018.
- Lock, Charles. "Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre." *Modern Drama* 31.1 (1988): 106-116. Print.
- London, Todd, eds. *An Ideal Theater: Founding Visions for a New American Art*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2013. Print.
- Loring, Kathryn. "Daughter Will Tour East with Mother's Three Act Comedy." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 8, 1958: G5. ProQuest. Web. 22 May 2018.

- Lovett, Robert Moses. "The Season of the Chicago Theatre Society. *The Drama* May 1912: 298 – 259. Print.
- Lynch, Agnes. "Lovers of Arts Find Haven in Dunes Colony." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Aug. 10, 1952: S4. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- Leonard, William. "3 New Theaters Display Wares." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 5, 1969: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- . "A Shakeup at the Goodman." *Chicago Tribune (1963 – Current file)* Jan. 19, 1972: 3. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- . "After ACT, it's Back to Theater Drawing Board." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* June 25, 1967: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.
- . "City's Repertory Dream Still that After 2 Years." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* July 7, 1968: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.
- . "Good Theater Aids Culture (and Business)." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Aug. 28, 1966: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.
- . "Goodman Lists Six Plays for its First Resident Season." *Chicago Tribune (1963 – Current file)* Aug. 24, 1969: 3. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- . "Goodman Theater to Go Professional in October." *Chicago Tribune (1963 – Current File)* Apr. 20, 1969: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- . "'Hair' and 'Soldiers': Week's 2 New Plays Hit at Establishment." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 19, 1969: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- . "It's Time Chicago Said Good Word for Second City." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Mar. 27, 1966: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- . "Local Talent Puts Over 'Big Deal'." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Aug. 16, 1961: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- . "'Marching Song' Opens Thursday at Goodman with a Look at Honor." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Feb. 28, 1971: 3. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- . "Mayor's Culture Committee Still Marking Time." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* July 9, 1967: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.
- . "Misanthrope Revival is Strained." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Aug. 22, 1968: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- . "On the Town." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Feb. 21, 1965: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

- . "On the Town." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Jan. 31, 1965: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017
- . "Playhouse is the Thing at Second City." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 10, 1961: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- . "Reich Lauded for Goodman Staging of Classic Plays." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Feb/ 21, 1960: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- . "Repertory May Be Next U. of C. Theater Venture." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Mar. 13, 1966: 13. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- . "Second City Opens its New Theater Wednesday." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* July 30, 1967: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- . "Second New Professional Theater in Hyde Park Launches Career Saturday." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Jan. 30, 1966: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- . "Theater for Chicago? If We Don't Stumble Taking the 1st Step." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* July 24, 1966: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.
- . "Theater Review: A Madhouse Promenade': To the Rear, Hark!" *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 20, 1972: 1 *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.
- . "Today's Day to Unveil City's New Repertory Theater--Where is it?" *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* July 13, 1969: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.
- . "U of C., Goodman Join in Theater Experiment." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Jan. 4, 1966: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- Mamet, David. "Why I Write for Chicago Theater." *Vanity Fair* November 1984: 52. Print.
- Mantle, Burns. "'Back Home' Sentiment Leaves New Yorkers Cold." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Nov. 28, 1915: E1. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- . "News of the Theaters" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Feb. 6, 1908: 8. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.
- . "News of the Theaters." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* May 16, 1908: 10. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.
- . "Second Nibbles at Drama Still Is Chicago's Fate." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec 29 1907: A1. *ProQuest*. Web. 7 Dec. 2013.
- Mason, Jeffrey D. *Melodrama and the Myth of America*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993. Print.
- Mayer, John. *The Steppenwolf Theatre Company of Chicago, 1974 – 1982*. Diss. U Missouri-Columbia, 1993. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1993. Print.

- McCabe, Terry. "Onstage at the Creation: The Role of Clergy in the Early Off-Loop Theatre Movement." *New England Theatre Journal* 23 (2012): 133-146. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- McCabe, Terry. "Stormfield Theatre Calls It A Day." Press Release. 25 Jan 1988. Stormfield Theatre Archive, Harold Washington Library Special Collections.
- "Members of Woman's Aid Club Who Will Give Play Today." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec 16 1905: 3. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018.
- Merryfield, Mary. "Are we Getting a New Theater for a New Age?" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Feb. 18, 1962: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- "'Mikado' Wages in New York to Top Equity Rate." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Feb. 19, 1939: 8. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018
- "Minturn Named Director of WPA Stage Project." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 3, 1938: 19. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- Miranda, Rowan A. "Post-Machine Regimes and the Growth of Government: A Fiscal History of the City of Chicago, 1970." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 28.3 (1993): 397 – 422. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- "Missouri Facing Rail Rate Snarl." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec. 21, 1913: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 28 June 2016.
- Mme. X. "Comment: News of Chicago Society It's Never Too Dry and Never Too Wet in Faraway Sweden." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* May 25, 1919: D2. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- . "News of Chicago Society – Diplomat's Visit..." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 30, 1927: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.
- . "News of Chicago Society: Graceful Gliders." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 28, 1923: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 July 2016.
- . "News of the Society World." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Aug. 24, 1913: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 28 June 2016.
- . "News of the Society World." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Nov. 30, 1913: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 28 June 2016.
- . "News of the Society World: Striking Points of Similarity Between Chicago and Perugia." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* May 19, 1912: B1. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Model Theater in Chicago." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Nov 26 1905: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018.
- Morgan, Anna. *My Chicago*. Chicago: Ralph Fletcher Seymour, 1918. Print.

- Morgi. "Plays Out of Town: Out of this World." *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)* Nov. 24, 1943: 62. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- "More Disclosures Expected in Western Indiana Case." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* May 11, 1910: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- Morris, Gay. "Bourdieu, The Body, and Graham's Post-War Dance." *Dance Research* 19.2 (2001): 52 – 82. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 19 June 2015.
- "Mrs. Aldis' Play about Food to be seen at 'Workshop.'" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb. 21, 1918: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.
- "Neal Caldwell to Quit." *New York Times (1923-Current file)* June 2, 1930: 29. *ProQuest*. Web. 19 Jan. 2017.
- "Neal Caldwell, Former Actor at Goodman, is Dead." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 4, 1933: 14. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- Newell, James S. "A Critical Analysis of The Development and Growth of the Kenneth Sawyer Goodman Memorial Theatre and School of Drama, Chicago, Illinois, 1925-1971." Diss. Wayne State, 1973. Print.
- Newlin, Keith. "Uplifting the Stage: Hamlin Garland and the Chicago Theater Society." *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 8.1 (1996): 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.
- "News of Chicago Society." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Aug. 20, 1916: 3. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.
- "News of Chicago Society." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb. 16, 1919: C4. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "News of Music." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Mar. 12, 1918: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "News of the Society Worlds: Numerous Box Parties at Extra Matinee of..." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Apr. 23, 1909: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "News of the Theaters." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* May 04 1906: 8. *ProQuest*. Web. 17 May 2018.
- "News of the Theatres." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Sept. 24, 1913: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 June 2016.
- "News of the Theatre: At the Majestic." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Mar. 26, 1919: 19. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "News of the Woman's Clubs." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Oct 29 1905: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 7 Dec. 2013.

- "News of the Woman's Clubs: Club Calendar for the Week." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Oct 29 1905: 6. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018.
- "Notes and News from the Theater World." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 20, 1943: E7. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Notes of the Plays and Players." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Oct. 4, 1914: G1. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Notes of the Plays and Players." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Oct. 4, 1914: G1. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Notes on the Stage" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923 – 1963)* June 5, 1957: 8. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- "Notes of the Theatre." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923 – 1963)* Oct. 25, 1959: 12. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- "Notes of the Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 31, 1943: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Notes of the Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Sept. 26, 1943: E4. *ProQuest* Web. 21 May 2018.
- Novick, Julius. "Regional Theatre in America: A Generation Comes of Age." *Performing Arts Journal*, May 1979: 159 – 166. *www.jstor.org*. Web. 11 Feb. 2010.
- Obituary 1 – No Title. *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923 – 1963)* Nov. 4, 1940: 22. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.
- Obituary 3 – No Title. *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923 – 1963)* Oct. 13, 1938: 18. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.
- "Order Deletions If 'Children's Hour' is to Play." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 12, 1940: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Organize Second City Center for Public Arts." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Sept. 23, 1966: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- Osborne, Elizabeth A. *Staging the People: Community and Identity in the Federal Theatre Project*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.
- "Other 22 - No Title." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current File)* Jan. 24, 1969: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.
- "Other 22 -- No Title." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 27, 1958: C19. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- "Other 32 - No Title." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Nov. 1, 1968: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.

"Other 33 -- No Title." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Jan. 19, 1975: 3. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.

"Other 89 - No Title." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Jan. 21, 1968: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.

"'Overtones' Given before Brilliant Society Audience." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Apr. 10, 1922: 25. *ProQuest*. Web. 19 July 2016.

Page, Eleanor. "Masks for Junior League Play." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 15, 1939: 35. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.

---. "Who Was That Dragon?" *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Nov. 21, 1965: E1. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

Parsi, Novid, and Christopher Piatt. "Color Bind." *Time Out Chicago*: [www.timeout.com/chicago](http://www.timeout.com/chicago). 26 July 2006: n. pag. Web. 5 May 2018.

Payne, B. Iden. *A Life in A Wooden O: Memoirs Of The Theatre*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1977. Print.

Pelham, Laura Dainty. "The Story of the Hull-House Players." *Drama Magazine*, May 1916: 249 – 262. Print.

Phillips, Sharon. "A Theatrical Tapestry." *Resetting The Stage: Theater Beyond The Loop, 1960-1990*. Chicago: Chicago Public Library, 1990. 7 - 10. Print.

"Photo Standalone 31 -- No Title." *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)* July 4, 1953: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

Pierce, L. France. "An Art Theatre in Successful Operation." *The Theatre Magazine* Aug. 1908: 215-17. Print.

---. "Chicago to Have Two Subsidized Playhouses." *The Theatre Magazine*, July 1906: 194-5. Print.

"Plan Auditions at Hull House Little Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 3, 1946: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

"Plan Endowed Theater to Aid Chicago Drama." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* May 9, 1911: 6. *ProQuest*. Web. 13 Dec. 2013.

"Plans Announced for Chicago Repertory Theater Company." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* July 14, 1966: 22. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.

"Play of Chicago Will Be Given for Dixon PTA." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 30, 1941: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.

"Plays & Players." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* May 22 1904: 21. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018.

Powers, Irene. "Critics Will Appraise Cultural Study of City." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Sept. 8, 1966: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Dec. 2017.



- Privatt, Kathy L. "The New Theater of Chicago: Democracy 1; Aristocracy 0." *Theatre History Studies* 24. (2004): 97-108. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.
- Pross, Paul Edward, Otto E. Anderson and Alice Gerstenberg, eds. *The Alice Gerstenberg Experimental Theatre Workshop*. Chicago. 1958. Print.
- "PWA Theater Unit Leases Blackstone for its Productions." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Feb. 12, 1936: 20. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- Quinn, James. "Avant-Garde Themes Draw Theater Crowds." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Feb. 4, 1968: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.
- Rakove, Milton L. *Don't Make No Waves--Don't Back No Losers: An Insider's Analysis of the Daley Machine*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1975. Print.
- Raven, Seymour. "Goodman Season to Open on Oct. 31." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 31, 1959: 7. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.
- Rich, J. Dennis, and Kevin L. Seligman. "The New Theatre of Chicago, 1906-1907." *Educational Theatre Journal*, 26.1 (1974): 53-68. Print.
- "Rites for Edith de Nancrede to be Tomorrow." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 1, 1936: 26. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- Robertson, Campbell. "Paul Sills, 80, Guru of the Improv Stage." *New York Times (1923-Current file)* June 4, 2008: 23. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 May 2018.
- Robertson, Donald. "Letter to Anna Titus Robertson, May 11, 1904." *Donald Robertson Papers (1825 - 1947)*. Chicago History Museum Research Center, Chicago, IL.
- . "Letter to Anna Titus Robertson, May 27, 1904." *Donald Robertson Papers (1825 - 1947)*. Chicago History Museum Research Center, Chicago, IL.
- . *The Player's Calling In Relation To Municipal Theatres*. Chicago: Manufacturers' And Dealers' Association Of America, 1915. Print.
- "Robertson, Noted Stage Veteran, Dies." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 21, 1926: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018.
- Ross, Norman. "Summing Up the Scene." *Chicago Magazine*, Winter 1967: 20-23. Print.
- Roy, Rob. "Joan Phillips Brown One of Top Prospects in Local Drama Setup." *Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1956-1960)* Sept. 29, 1959: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- Russo, Larry. Telephone interview. 9 Dec. 2010.
- "Saga of Chicago Portrayed by Uptown Actors." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 8, 1944: 2.

*ProQuest*. Web. 22 July 2016.

Schechner, Richard. "'The New Establishment'? Fragments of the TDR Theatre Conference." *The Tulane Drama Review* 10.4 (1966): 109–129. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 May 2018.

Schmitt, Patrick. "The Chicago Federal Theatre Project: 1935-1939." MA Thesis. U of Illinois Chicago, 1978. Print.

Scrapbook #2. *Alice Gerstenberg Papers (1903 – 1971)*. Newberry Library, Chicago.

Seham, Amy E. *Whose Improv Is It Anyway?: Beyond Second City*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2001. Print.

S.H. "Chi Actors Open Week-End Series." *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)* July 18, 1942: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

Shattuck, Charles H. "Memoirs of B. Iden Payne." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29 (1978): 304–8. Print.

Siegel, Fred. "Mayors and Morality: Daley and Lindsay Then and Now." *Partisan Review* 68.2 (2001): 218–227. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 27 Dec. 2017.

Sickinger, Robert. Personal interview. 21 May 2011.

Sills, Kathleen. "The Inside Track to the Future: Chicago Theater, 1950–1971." Diss. Tufts U, 2001. Print.

Sills, Paul, and Charles L. Mee. "The Celebratory Occasion." *The Tulane Drama Review* 9.2 (1964): 167–181. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 May 2017.

Sills, Paul. "Telling Stories." *Theater* Sept. 1998: 61. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

---. "Letter from Chicago." *Yale/theatre* 1.2 (Summer 1968): 51-52. *EBSCOhost*, 26 Dec. 2017.

"Sills Plans New Theater in Old Town." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* June 23, 1968: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.

"Sisterhoods Plan Annual Torah Fete." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 10, 1953: F6. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.

Smith, Cecil. "Actors Group Deals Expertly with War Play: 'Letters to Lucerne.'" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 6, 1942: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

---. "Chicago Cast's 'Guest in the House' is a Hit." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* July 8, 1943: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

---. "'Junior Miss' Returns to Erlanger Theater Tonight: Prices Reduced." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 27, 1943: E2. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

---. "Life and Zest in Play About Drama Critic." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 19, 1942: 23. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

- . "Moon Is Down' Rated Failure, but with Honor." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Aug. 8, 1942: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- l. "Theatrical Producing Company to Be Formed in Milwaukee." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Aug. 16, 1942: F. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- . "Trick Ending Is Too Late to Save Comedy." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 8, 1942: 22. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- Smith, Ryan. "Peter Thiel and 'The YouTube Couple' Stir Chicago's Second City Syndrome." *Chicago Reader*, [www.chicagoreader.com](http://www.chicagoreader.com). N. pag. Web. 2 May 2018.
- "Society and Entertainments." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* May 8, 1913: 13. *ProQuest*. Web. 28 June 2016.
- "Society and Entertainments: Benefit Bridge Party Provides for Children." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Mar. 11, 1918: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Society and Entertainments: Lake Forest Plays Bridge in French." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* July 24, 1916: 14. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Society Bud a Playwright: Two Sketches by Miss Dorothy Martyn." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872 – 1922)* Feb. 9, 1908: 3. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- "Society Busy; College Set Coming Home." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 18, 1930: 21. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.
- "Society's Patrons of the Arts Turn Out for Opening of 'Gas'." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 28, 1926: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.
- "Society, Meetings & Entertainments: Anti-Divorce Afternoons Quaker City Society Plan." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Aug. 15, 1911: 6. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- Sozen, Joyce Lorraine Chalcraft. "Anna Morgan: Reader, Teacher, And Director." Diss. U of Illinois, 1961. Print.
- "Stage Notes." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 27, 1958: C19. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- Stavru, William N. "Second City and Story Theatre Founder Paul Sills." *The Bardian* Nov. 1996. N. Pag. [www.paulsills.com](http://www.paulsills.com). Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- Stevens, Thomas Wood. "Robertson: A Record." *The Play-Book* May 1913: 3 – 9. Print.
- . "The Plan of the Drama Department." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907 – 1951)* 19.6 (1925): 67-69. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 May 2018.
- . "What the Audience Wants." *Theatre Arts Monthly*: Jan 1931: 61. Print.

- "Stock Review: The Crucible." *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)* Dec. 3, 1958: 90. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Studebaker Bookings Shuffled." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 10, 1957: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- "Succeeds Jane Addams." *New York Times (1923-Current file)* Oct. 1, 1935: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- Swan, David, Elia Wilkinson and Ralph Fletcher Seymour, eds. *The Book Of The Fine Arts Building: A Facsimile Edition Of The Original Monograph*. Chicago: Hyoogen Press, 2008. Print.
- Sweet, Jeffrey. "American Conservatory Theater Looks Back on Its Time in Chicago." *American Theatre* Oct. 2014. [www.americantheatre.org](http://www.americantheatre.org). Web. 20 Dec. 2017.
- Syse, Glenna. "Steppenwolf's Grim Balm in Gilead Simply Great Theatre." *Chicago Sun-Times* Sept. 10, 1980: 14. *Newsbank*. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.
- . "The Theatre – Such As It Is" *Chicago Magazine* Winter 1965: 10-12. Print.
- Taylor Diana. *The Archive and The Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. Print.
- "Tea for Prof. Neva Boyd." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Feb. 8, 1941: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- Terry, Clifford. "Sinise to Steinbeck to Sinise: A Lifelong Passion Comes to the Screen." *Chicago Tribune (1963 – Current file)* Sept. 13, 1992: 134. *ProQuest*. Web. 3 June 2018.
- . "Steppin' Out with the Steppenwolf." *Chicago Tribune (1963 – Current file)* Mar. 21, 1982: J36. *ProQuest*. Web. 14 Nov. 2010.
- Thalia. "Goodman Theater Will Provide for Most Modern Plays." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 28, 1929: 39. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- . "Junior League Play Expert Visiting here." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 6, 1930: 17. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.
- . "Mrs. Carpenter to Talk Today on Decoration." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 5, 1930: 23. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.
- . "Society Busy; College Set Coming Home." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 18, 1930: 21. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 July 2016.
- "The Goodman Announces." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 15, 1930: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.

- "The Lake Forest Players in Boston." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Dec. 28, 1913: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 28 June 2016.
- "'The Mikado' Becomes Hit of the Season." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 1, 1939: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- "The New Goodman Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Sept. 27, 1925: 8. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- "'The Philistine' Takes Rooms of Little Theatre." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Aug. 25, 1917: 13. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "The Stage." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 3, 1940: 19. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "The Stage." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* May 1, 1936: 27. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- "The Stage." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Nov. 25, 1936: 19. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- "The Theatre Arts Chronicle." *Theatre Arts* July 1919: 215. Print.
- "The Theatre Journal Auto/Archive: Laurence Senelick." *Theatre Journal* 56.2 (2004): 341-349. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 19 Jan. 2017.
- "Theater Notes." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Jan. 5, 1964: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Dec. 2017.
- "Theater notes." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current File)* Mar. 30, 1969: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Dec 2017.
- "Thomas Stevens, Former Theater Director, Dies." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 30, 1942: 14. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- "Thrillers and Food Comedy Delight at Players' Workshop." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb. 27, 1918: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 June 2016.
- Tingley, Donald F. "Ellen Van Volkenburg, Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre." *Illinois Historical Journal* 80.3 (1987): 130-146. Print.
- "Tradition Casts Halo Over Hull House Theatre." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Dec. 8, 1940: 1. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- "Two Wilmette Groups to Give Play Four Times." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Feb. 22, 1953: N9. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 May 2018.
- Vactor, Vanita Marian. "A History of the Chicago Federal Theatre Project Negro Unit, 1935-1939." Diss. New York U, 1998. Print.
- Vettel, Phil. "Nontraditional Casting Auditions in Chicago." *Chicago Tribune (pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Apr. 17, 1987: H. *ProQuest*. Web. 12 May 2018.

- Vire, Kris. "Why is Theater in Chicago (Still) So White?" *Time Out Chicago*: [www.timeout.com/chicago](http://www.timeout.com/chicago). Dec. 7, 2016: n. pag. Web. 5 May 2018.
- "Vivian Tobin Charms as Alice: Lewis Carroll's Classic Characters in a..." *New York Tribune (1911-1922)* Mar. 24, 1915: 9. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- Wallace, David H. "Donald Robertson, The Idealist." *New York Dramatic Mirror* Oct. 15, 1913: n. pag. Print.
- Wendt, Lloyd. "They Work at Playing." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Jan. 4, 1942:1. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- White, Melvin R. "Thomas Wood Stevens: Creative Pioneer." *Educational Theatre Journal* 3.4 (Dec. 1951): 280-293. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Wife 'Bum'; Spent Her Money." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Feb. 9, 1912: 3. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- Winer, Linda. "Codes Stymie Theater Groups." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Nov. 15, 1972: 1. *ProQuest*. 25 Apr. 2013.
- . "Mull Theater Fate." *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 26, 1972: 1. *ProQuest*. 25 Apr 2013.
- . "When is a Warehouse Not a Theater?" *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Nov. 19, 1972: M12. *ProQuest*. 25 Apr. 2013.
- Winn, Marcia. "Goodman Tries New Juvenile Drama Theory." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Mar. 11, 1935: 15. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- "Women to Own Theater." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)* Mar 01 1906: 6. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 May 2018.
- Wood, Deborah L. "All the North Side's a Stage." *Chicago Tribune (1963 – Current file)* June 6, 1984: 2. *ProQuest*. Web. 18 June 2015.
- "WPA Dramatic Project Woos College Stars." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* June 6, 1936: 11. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- "WPA Puts Off Play's Opening a Second Time." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* Oct. 15, 1936: 10. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 May 2018.
- Zehme, Bill. "Hot Chicago." *Vanity Fair* Nov. 1984: 50-115. Print.
- Zeigler, Joseph Wesley. *Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1973. Print.

## Works Consulted

- "A Dramatic Feast" *The Dial* May 16, 1908: 293-5. Print.
- Abarbanel, Jonathan. "City Shuttters Six Theatres." *Back Stage* 44.50 (2003): 40. *Business Source Complete*. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.
- . "Chi Venue Closures Spur Mayoral Action." *Back Stage* 45.4 (2004): 6-36. *Business Source Complete*. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.
- "Actors Company 1940s – 1961." *Chicago Theatre Collection – Miscellaneous Programs, Box 1* Harold Washington Library Special Collections, Chicago.
- Adams, Don and Arlene Goldbard. *Creative Community: The Art Of Cultural Development*. New York: Rockefeller Foundation, Creativity & Culture Division, 2001. Print.
- Adler, Anthony. "Act Two." *Chicago Magazine* Oct. 1991: 139. Print.
- "Announcement: Exhibitions, Lectures, Musicales, Receptions, etc., for the Season of 1909-10." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 3.3 (1910): 39-41. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- "Announcement: The Art Institute of Chicago: Exhibitions, Lectures, Musicales, Receptions, etc., for the Season of 1909-10." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 3.2 (1909): 23-5. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- "Another Stage Experiment." *The Nation* 13 July 1911: 41. Print.
- Appler, Gilbert Keith. "Chicago's Goodman Theatre: Plays And Cultural Work in an Institutional Theatre." Diss. U. of Illinois, 1994. Print.
- Aronson, Arnold. *American Avant-garde Theatre: A History*. London : Routledge, 2000. Print.
- "At the Little and Experimental Theatres, 1918." *Theatre Arts Magazine* Dec. 1917: 56. Print.
- "At the Little and Experimental Theatres, 1918." *Theatre Arts Magazine* Dec. 1917: 60. Print.
- "At the Little and Experimental Theatres." *Theatre Arts Magazine* Feb. 1918: 111. Print.
- "At the Little Theatres." *Theatre Arts Magazine* Aug. 1917: 199. Print.
- "At the Little Theatres." *Theatre Arts Magazine* Feb. 1917: 88. Print.
- "At the Little Theatres." *Theatre Arts Magazine* May 1917: 143. Print.
- "At the Little Theatres." *Theatre Arts Magazine* Nov. 1916: 38. Print.
- Barton, Melissa. "Speaking a Mutual Language: The Negro People's Theatre in Chicago." *TDR: The Drama Review* 54.3 (2010): 54-70. Print.

- Bauerlein, Mark and Ellen Grantham, eds. *National Endowment For The Arts: A History, 1965-2008*. Washington, DC: National Endowment For The Arts, 2009. Print.
- Becker, Howard S. and Michal M. McCall, Lori V. Morris, Paul Meshejian. "Theatres and Communities: Three Scenes." *Social Problems* 36.2 (1989): 93-116. JSTOR. Web. 11 Feb. 2010.
- Bergman, Chad Eric. "We Do Storefront Theatre: Using Chicago's Storefront Theatre Model as the Foundation for a Theatre Curriculum." *Theatre Topics* 20.1 (2010): 55 – 64. Print.
- Bergmann, Linda Shell, and Margaret Yntema. "A Conversation with John Schultz." *Chicago Review* 28.3 (1977): 187-200. JSTOR. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.
- Best, Mrs. A. Starr. "The Drama League of America 1914." *The Drama* Feb. 1914: 135-49. Print.
- Biles, Roger. *Richard J. Daley: Politics, Race, And The Governing Of Chicago*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1995. Print.
- Blair, Karen J. *The Torchbearers: Women and Their Amateur Arts Associations in America, 1890-1930*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. Print.
- Brown, Maurice F. "William Vaughn Moody (1869-1910)." *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910*, 6.1 (1973): 51–60. JSTOR, Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- Bosco, Beatrice. "Surviving Collectives: Collective Theatre Practices and the Steppenwolf Theatre Company." Diss. U Wisconsin - Madison, 1997. Print.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, and Craig J. Calhoun, Moishel Postone, and Edward LiPuma, eds. *Bourdieu, Critical Perspectives*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993. Print.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Sociology In Question*. London: Sage, 1993. Print.
- . *In Other Words: Essays Towards A Reflexive Sociology*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990. Print.
- Brecher, Charles and Raymond D. Horton. *Power Failure: New York City Politics And Policy Since 1960*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993. Print.
- Brett, Becky. "Theatre Town Chicago: A 3-Part Series." *Performink Online* June 8, 2008. [www.performink.com](http://www.performink.com). Web. 22 June 2010.
- Brown, Les. "Do-It-Yourself Trend in Chi Legit; Windy City Intelligentsia 'Starved' For Plays Not Blatantly Slick." *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)* Nov. 5, 1958: 71. ProQuest. Web. 21 May 2018.
- Brustein, Robert. "The Idea of Theatre at Yale: A Speech and an Interview." *Educational Theatre Journal* 22.3 (1970): 235-48. JSTOR. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.
- "Calendar of Lectures." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 3.2 (1909): 26. JSTOR. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.



Carmichael, Michael. "The Scenic Art of J. Blandings Sloan." *Theatre Arts Magazine* Summer 1918: 163. Print.

Cassidy, Claudia. "Open Sesame! The Search for Theatre Treasure." *Chicago Magazine* Aug. 1983: 20. Print.

Cheney, Sheldon. *The Art Theatre: A Discussion of Its Ideals, Its Organization, and Its Promise As a Corrective for Present Evils in the Commercial Theatre*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1917. Print.

---. *The New Movement In The Theatre*. New York: B. Blom, 1971. Print.

"Chi Ams Turn Pro." *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)* Aug. 21, 1946: 59. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2018.

Christians, Lindsay Nicole. "Critics as Comrades: Critical Perspectives on the Chicago Off-Loop Theatre Movement." Diss. U Wisconsin-Madison, 2008. Print.

Christiansen, Richard. "Chicago Grows Its Own." *American Theatre* Oct. 1987: 50-54. Print.

Crespy, David Allison. *Off-Off-Broadway Explosion: How Provocative Playwrights of the 1960s Ignited a New American Theater*. New York: Back Stage Books, 2003. Print.

Crossley, Robert. "The First Wellsians: A Modern Utopia and Its Early Disciples." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*. 54:4 (2011): 444-69. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.

Davis, R.G. "Benjamin, Storytelling and Brecht in the USA." *New German Critique* 17 (1979): 143-56. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.

Dickinson, Hugh. "'Ovid's Metamorphoses, by Arnold Weinstein' Review." *Educational Theatre Journal* 21.4 (1969): 455-6. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.

Doane, Randal. "The Habitus of Dancing: Notes on the Swing Dance Revival in New York City." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35.1 (2006): 84-116. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 21 May 2018.

"Dolls' Houses For the Drama." *Current Literature* Jan. 1912: n. pag. Print.

"Drama." *The Nation* Nov. 9, 1911: 451. Print.

"Drama: The Drama Players of Chicago." *The Nation* Nov. 30, 1911: 528-9. Print.

"Drama and Music: Another Stage Experiment." *The Nation* July 13, 1911: 41-2. Print.

"Dramatic Entertainments." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 2.2 (1908): 22. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 June 2018.

Dryden, Wilma J. "Irony Prologue and Epilogue to the Iroquois Fire." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 54.2 (1968): 147-53. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 21 May 2018.

- Dyja, Tom. *The Third Coast: When Chicago Built the American Dream*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2013. Print.
- Elliott, S.B., "The Drama League of America." *The Drama* Feb. 1911: 116-21. Print.
- Farber, David R. *Chicago '68*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1988. Print.
- Fern, Annette. "Deconstructing the Goodman: Documents of a Twentieth-Century Stage." *Theatre Survey* 47.1 (2006): 93-105. EBSCOhost. Web. 08 Jun. 2018.
- Fosdick, Scott Beaman. "The Press on Chicago Theatre: Influencing an Emergent Style." Diss. Northwestern U, 1991. Print.
- . "Putting Theatre in its Place." *Resetting the Stage: Theatre Beyond the Loop, 1960 – 1990*. Chicago: Chicago Public Library, 1990. 11-15. Print.
- . "From Discussion Leader to Consumer Guide: A Century of Theatre Criticism in Chicago Newspapers." *Journalism History* 30.2 (2004): 91-97. EBSCOhost. Web. 21 May 2018.
- Frohman, Charles. "Why Some of Our Dramatists Fail." *The Theatre Magazine* Aug. 1907: 326. Print.
- Garland, Hamlin. "A New Idea in Theatre Management." *Metropolitan Magazine* Feb. 1912: 21-3. Print.
- . "Starring the Play." *The Nation*, July 20, 1911: 54. Print.
- Geigner, Megan E. "'The World in Miniature': Nationality Performed in the Columbian Exposition and Chicago Immigrant Theatre." *New England Theatre Journal* 23 (2012):91-110. EBSCOhost. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- Gentile, John Samuel. "'The Singing Bone and Other Stories' Review." *Performance in Review* 1981. N. Pag. Print.
- Gerstenberg, Alice. "Hope of the Little Theatre in Chicago" *Townfolk* Dec. 1947: n. Pag. *Alice Gerstenberg Papers (1903 – 1971)*. Newberry Library, Chicago.
- . "Hope of the Little Theatre in Chicago." *Townfolk* Jan. 1948: n. Pag. *Alice Gerstenberg Papers (1903 – 1971)*. Newberry Library, Chicago.
- . "Hope of the Little Theatre in Chicago." *Townfolk* Feb. 1948: n. pag. *Alice Gerstenberg Papers (1903 – 1971)*. Newberry Library, Chicago.
- . "Hope of the Little Theatre in Chicago." *Townfolk* Mar. 1948: n. pag. *Alice Gerstenberg Papers (1903 – 1971)*. Newberry Library, Chicago.
- Gitlin, Todd. *The Sixties: Years Of Hope, Days Of Rage*. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1987. Print.
- . *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media In The Making & Unmaking of the New Left*. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1980. Print.

- Glick, Bobbie R. "Spirited Stages: Focus on Four Off-Loop theaters, 1970-1980. MA Thesis. Lake Forest College, 1998. Print.
- Goodman, Kenneth Sawyer. "Drama: The Chicago Theatre Society." *The Nation*, Mar. 19, 1914: 308-9. Print.
- Gruhn, Laurie Ann. "Interview: Paul Sills Reflects on 'Story Theatre.'" *The Drama/Theatre Teacher* 5.2 (1993): 31-4. Print.
- Hancock, Black Hawk. "'It Looks so Natural': Bodily Labor and Learning to Dance the Lindy Hop." *Conference Papers -- American Sociological Association*, 2004: 1-64. EBSCOhost. Web. 8 June 2018.
- Hatton Boyer, Bruce. "Can Chicago Theater Survive Success?" *North Shore* Sept. 1985: 58. Print.
- Hecht, Stuart J. "Robert Sickinger: 1927 – 2013." *American Theatre* Sept. 2013: 21. Print.
- . "Social and Artistic Integration: The Emergence of Hull-House Theatre." *Theatre Journal* 34.2 (1982): 172-82. EBSCOhost. Web. 21 May 2018.
- . "Staging the Avant-Garde." *Chicago History* 17 (1988): 46-61. Print.
- Horowitz, Helen Lefkowitz. *Culture & The City: Cultural Philanthropy In Chicago From The 1880's to 1917*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1976. Print.
- Jacobi, Peter P. "Repertory Theater, Chance to Vote Yes." *Chicago Magazine* Spring 1966: 23. Print.
- Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House, 2002. Print.
- Jaques, Damien. "Regional Roundup: Wisconsin." *Back Stage* 40.25 (1999): 32. EBSCOhost. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.
- Johnson, Martyn. "The Chicago Theatre Society: A Step Toward the Future Theatre," *The Drama* Nov. 1913: 194-9. Print.
- Kauffman, Stanley. "The Theatre in New York." *New York Affairs* 4.4 (1978): 27 – 39. Print.
- Kennedy, Eugene C. *Himself!: The Life And Times of Mayor Richard J. Daley*. New York: Viking, 1978. Print.
- Kotynek, Roy and John Cohassey. *American Cultural Rebels: Avant-garde and Bohemian Artists, Writers and Musicians From the 1850s Through the 1960s*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2008. Print.
- Koyama, Christine. "It's Show Time! The Changing Face of Off-Loop Theatre." *Chicago Magazine* Oct. 1980: 178. Print.
- "The Generation of Dreams: 'Say Goodnight, Gracie' Has Some Answers for the Children of the

- Sixties." *Chicago Magazine* Jan. 1980: 163. Print.
- . "Welcome to the Theatre: And a Season Fraught with Possibilities." *Chicago Magazine* Oct. 1981: 140 – 141. Print.
- Kroll, Jack and Patricia King. "All The City's a Stage." *Newsweek* July 8, 1985: 72. Print.
- Kruger, Loren. "Cold Chicago: Uncivil Modernity, Urban Form, and Performance in the Upstart City." *TDR: The Drama Review* 53.3 (2009): 10-36. EBSCOhost. Web. 21 May 2018.
- "Lecture Attendance." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 2.3 (1909): 44. JSTOR. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- "Lecture Attendance." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 3.1 (1909): 7. JSTOR. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- "Lecture Attendance." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 3.4. (1910): 63. JSTOR. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- "Lecture Attendance." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 4.1 (1910): 15. JSTOR. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- "Lectures in Fullerton Memorial Hall." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 2.2 (1908): 24-5. JSTOR. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- "Lecture Attendance." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 2.4 (1909): 57. JSTOR. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- Leonard, William. "Night on the Town." *Chicago Magazine* Winter 1965: 9. Print.
- Lewis, Allan. "'Story Theatre, The Revenger's Tragedy by Cyril Tourneur' Review." *Educational Theatre Journal* 23.1. (1971): 82-4. JSTOR. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.
- Loerzel, Robert. "Chicago, 'Puppeteer' City." *Huffington Post* July 6, 2010.  
[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-loerzel/chicago-puppeteer-city\\_b\\_634493.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-loerzel/chicago-puppeteer-city_b_634493.html). Web. 21 May 2018.
- London, Todd. "Chicago Impromptu." *American Theatre* July/Aug. 1990: 14-64. Print.
- . "Spolin and Sills Laid Down the Rules, the Generations Who Came After Played by Them." *American Theatre*, July-Aug. 1990: N. Pag. Print.
- Long, Robert Emmet, "Goodbye, Fillmore East; Hello Broadway." *The North American Review* 2 (1971): 79. EBSCOhost. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.
- Mapes, Victor. "An Art Theatre in Operation." *The Theatre Magazine*. Aug. 1907: 201 – 209. Print.
- McCauley, L.M. "Municipal Art in Chicago: A Civic Renaissance Planned for the Western Metropolis." *The*

- Craftsman* Dec. 1905: 340. Print.
- McCrohan, Donna. *The Second City: A Backstage History of Comedy's Hottest Troupe*. New York: Putnam, 1987. Print.
- Medak, Susan. "Reflections on the Chicago Theatre Scene." *Sidelights* 14.5 (1988): n. pag. Stormfield Theatre Archive, Harold Washington Library Special Collections.
- Mele, Christopher. *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2000. Print.
- Miller, Hillary. "Drop Dead: Municipal Crisis and the Geographies of Performance in New York City, 1972-1982." Diss. City University of New York, 2013. Print.
- Monroe, Harriet. "Little Theatres and Poetic Plays." *Poetry* 11.4 (1918): 201-7. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 Jun. 2016.
- Morris, Gay. "Considering Directors and Directing in South African Theatre." *South African Theatre Journal* 20. (2006): 11-29. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 08 Jun. 2018.
- . "Flexible Weaving: Investigating the Teaching and Learning Opportunities in the Practices of Theatre-Makers and Performers from Selected Townships in Cape Town." *RiDE: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 18.1 (2013): 4-24. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 08 Jun 2018.
- . "Institutional Arrangements of Theatre in the Cape: The Case of Township Theatre." *South African Theatre Journal* 22 (2008): 102-118. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 08 Jun. 2018.
- . "Modernism's Role in the Theory of John Martin and Edwin Denby." *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 22.2. (2004): 168-84. *EBSCOhost*. Web 08 Jun. 2018.
- . "Townships, Identity and Collective Theatre Making by Young South Africans." *South African Theatre Journal* 21 (2007): 166-79. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 08 Jun. 2018.
- Moser, Daniel Edward. "Victory Gardens, 1974—2000: A Cultural History of Chicago Theatre." Diss. Northwestern U, 2001. Print.
- Mullgardt, Brian. "The Whole Neighborhood is Watching: Community Influence on the Events Surrounding the 1968 Democratic National Convention." *Journal of Illinois History* 11.4 Winter 2008: 238 – 260. Print.
- Murphy, Bren Adair Ortega "Rhetorical Strategies of Chicago Regional Theater in the 1970s: A Case Study of Audience Development." Diss. Northwestern U, 1984. Print.
- "Notes." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 3.3 (1910): 46-7. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- "Notes." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 10.5 (1916): 187-193. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- "Notes." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 14.1 (1920): 10-13. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.

- Ogden, Jean, and Jesse Ogden. *Everyman's Drama: A Study of the Noncommercial Theatre in the United States*. New York: American Association for Adult Education, 1938. Print.
- Pacyga, Dominic A. *Chicago: A Biography*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2009. Print.
- Patinkin, Sheldon. *The Second City: Backstage at the World's Greatest Comedy Theater*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2000. Print.
- Pickering, Jerry V. "William Vaughn Moody: The Dramatist as Social Philosopher." *Modern Drama* 14.1 (1971): 93-103. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- Pollack, Richard. "When the Play and the Players Are All." *Chicago Magazine* March 1981: 118. Print.
- "Progress of the Drama League." *The Drama* Nov. 1911: 223-7. Print.
- Rakove, Milton K. *We Don't Want Nobody Nobody Sent: An Oral History of the Daley Years*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1979. Print.
- Rice, Wallace. "The New Theatre of Chicago." *The World Today* Aug. 1906: 846. Print.
- Riggio, Thomas P., "Dreiser and Kirah Markham: The Play's the Thing," *Studies in American Naturalism*, 1. 1-2 (2006): 109 – 127. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 21 May 2018.
- Savran, David. "Choices Made and Unmade." *Theater* 31.2 (2001): 89-95. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 08 Jun. 2018.
- . "Response to the Responses." *Theater* 31.2 (2001): 106-7. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 08 Jun 2018.
- . "Toward Hystography of the Popular." *Theatre Survey* 45.2 (2004): 211-7. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 08 Jun. 2018.
- Schwieterman, Joseph P. and Dana M. Caspell. *The Politics of Place: A History of Zoning in Chicago*. Chicago: Lake Claremont Press, 2006. Print.
- Schulfer, Roche. "Starting A Scene or Two." *The Notre Dame Scholastic*. 03 Nov 1972: 26-7. Print.
- Shiflett, James. "Body Politic, Heart, Alas, Economic." *Alternative Theatre* 1.2 (1975): 3. Print.
- Sills, Paul. "A Monster Model Fun House." *TDR: Tulane Drama Review* 10.2 (1965): 224-8. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.
- Sills, Paul and Charles L. Mee. "The Celebratory Occasion." *TDR: Tulane Drama Review* 9.2 (1964): 167-81. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.
- Sills, Paul, and R.G. Davis. "A Dialogue (Concerning Improvisational Theater in America)." *Yale/theatre* 5.2 (1974): 26-55. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- Skrebneski, Victor. *Steppenwolf Theatre Company: Twenty-Five Years of an Actor's Theatre*. Naperville,

IL: Sourcebooks, 2000. Print.

Solomon, Alisa. "The Goodman, the Organic and the St. Nicholas: Resident Theaters in Chicago." *Theater* 10.3 (1979): 75-81. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 08 Jun. 2018.

Starr, Roger. *The Rise And Fall Of New York City*. New York: Basic Books, 1985. Print.

"Steppenwolf's New Stage." *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 1.3 (2003): 66-73. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 21 May 2018.

Sullivan, Catey. "How Chicago Became World Premiere Capital." *Crain's Chicago Business* 17 Oct 2016: 35. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.

Sweet, Jeffrey. "American Conservatory Theater Looks Back on Its Time in Chicago." *American Theatre* Oct. 2014: N. Pag. Print.

---. "Paul Sills: 1927 – 2008." *American Theatre* Sept. 2008: 20-1. Print.

---. *Something Wonderful Right Away*. New York: Avon Books, 1978. Print.

T.H. "Drama: The Little Theatres." *The Nation*, 03 May 1919: 702-3. Print.

"The Augustus Saint-Gaudens Memorial Exhibition" *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 3.2 (1909): 18-21. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.

"The Book of the Pageant." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 24 (1909): 50-1. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.

"The Chicago Civic Theatre." *The Drama* Mar. 1923: 214-28. Print.

"The Chicago Theatre Society." *The Dial* 1 Aug. 1911. 63-5. Print.

"The Chimera of a National Theater." *Current Literature* June 1908: 665. Print.

"The Donald Robertson Players." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 2.3 (1909): 46-47. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 June 2018.

"The Donald Robertson Players." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 2.4 (1909): 56. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 June 2018.

"The Drama Players in Chicago." *The Dial* April 16, 1912: 620. Print.

"The Early Years: 1907 to Early 1980's." *Cliff Dwellers Chicago*. <http://cliff-chicago.org/who-we-are/history/the-early-years/>. Web. 08 Jun. 2018.

"The Making of Make-Believe." *Yale/theatre* 3.2 (1971): 52-8. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.

"The Pageant of the Antiquarian Society." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 2.3 (1909):

33. JSTOR. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- "The Pageant of the Italian Renaissance." *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907-1951)* 2.4 (1909): 49-50. JSTOR. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- "The SCT Touring Company to perform for SCA." *Spectra*, August 1990: 3. Print.
- "The Theatrical Uplift." *The Dial* Oct. 1, 1909: 559. Print.
- "The Upward Trend of the Theater in America." *Current Literature* Dec. 1909: 673-5. Print.
- "The Work of the Drama League." *The Dial* Mar. 1, 1912: 151-3. Print.
- Thomas, Mike. *The Second City Unscripted: Revolution and Revelation at the World-Famous Comedy Theater*. New York: Villard, 2009. Print.
- "Vital Themes of Foreign Playwrights." *Current Literature* Aug. 1909: N. Pag. Print.
- Wade, Lisa. "The Emancipatory Promise of the Habitus: Lindy hop, the Body, and Social Change." *Ethnography* 12.2 (2011): 224-46. EBSCOhost. Web. 21 May 2018.
- Wallace, R. and D. Wallace. "Origins of Public Health Collapse in New York City: The Dynamics of Planned Shrinkage, Contagious Urban Decay and Social Disintegration." *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine: Journal of Urban Health* 66.5 (1990): 391-434. EBSCOhost. Web. 8 Jun. 2018.
- "What Chicago's Drama Players Did." *The Literary Digest* May 18, 1912: 1039-40. Print.
- White, Jr., Matthew. "Chicago's Bid for Better Drama." *Munsey's Magazine* Jan. 1912: 585-90. Print.
- Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays*. London: Verso, 2005. Print.
- . *Culture And Society, 1780-1950*. New York: Columbia UP, 1983. Print.
- . *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985. Print.
- . *Marxism And Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977. Print.
- Wagenknecht, Edward. *Chicago*. Norman: U of Oklahoma Press, 1964. Print.
- Zeigler, Joseph Wesley. "Centrality Without Philosophy: The Crisis in the Arts." *New York Affairs* 4.4 (1978): 12 – 22. Print.



## Archives Consulted

*Alice Gerstenberg Papers (1903 – 1971)*. Midwest Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.

*Body Politic Theatre Collection*. Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Library Center, Special Collections, Chicago.

*Chicago Theatre Collection – Historic Programs*. Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Library Center, Special Collections, Chicago.

*Chicago Theatre Collection – Miscellaneous Programs*. Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Library Center, Special Collections, Chicago.

*Cloyd Head Papers (1895 – 1968)*. Midwest Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.

*Commons Theatre Collection*. Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Library Center, Special Collections, Chicago.

*Donald Robertson Papers, 1825-1947, Bulk 1900-1926*. Chicago History Museum Research Center, Chicago.

*Organic Theatre Collection*. Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Library Center, Special Collections, Chicago.

*Performink Collection*. Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Library Center, Special Collections, Chicago.

*Stormfield Theatre Records*. Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Library Center, Special Collections, Chicago.

## **Newspapers Consulted**

Baltimore Sun  
Boston Daily Globe  
Chicago Daily News  
Chicago Defender  
Chicago Record-Herald  
Chicago Reader  
Crain's Chicago Business  
Christian Science Monitor  
Cincinnati Enquirer  
Detroit Free Press  
Indianapolis Star  
Los Angeles Times  
Manchester Guardian (UK)  
Maysville (KY) Daily Evening Bulletin  
New York Times  
New York Tribune  
Ogden (UT) Morning Examiner  
Omaha Daily Bee  
Salt Lake Tribune  
San Francisco Chronicle  
Scranton (PA) Tribune  
Washington Post  
St. Louis Post-Dispatch  
St. Paul (MN) Globe